76/175
C
V.1

The Bancroft Library

University of California • Berkeley

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement with Bernice H. May, dated 30 March 1974. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California at Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, 486 Library, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

The Bancroft Library University of California/Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office

Women in Politics Oral History Project

Bernice Hubbard May

A NATIVE DAUGHTER'S LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Volume I

With An Introduction by
Winifred Heard

An Interview Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris

Copy No. /

© 1976 by The Regents of the University of California

Bernice Hubbard May
1959

TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Bernice Hubbard May

VOLUME I

PREFACE i

INTRODUCTION by Winifred Heard ii

INTERVIEW HISTORY viii

I PRELIMINARY CONVERSATION 1

Thoughts on Local Politics 1

The Negro Community Then 6

II FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD 11

Gold Rush Days 11

Grandfather Hubbard: Goldmining and Grain 12

Indians in Colusa County 16

Brooks Grandparents: the Merchant and the Milliner 18

Ranching in California 21

Marketing the Crops 28

1906 Earthquake 28

A Child's Activities 30

III BERKELEY: SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY YEARS 35

Moving from the Ranch 35

Distinguished Friends and Visitors 38

Berkeley High School 40

Mountain Expeditions 42

World War I Begins 45

Postwar Disillusionment 47

University of California: 1914-1918 49

Economics Studies 50

Campus Activities 53

Social Concerns 55

Involvement in World War I 56

IV CAREER IN ADULT EDUCATION: 1923-1945 59

UC Extension Division 59

Adult Education Associations 61

Workers' Education 63

Times of Trouble 65

Living Near North Beach 66

Planning Curriculum 67

Depression and General Strike 69

Sidelight on General Johnson, the NRA, and Phi Beta Kappa 73

President Roosevelt's Planning and Social Goals 74

Engineering, Science, and Management War Training 75

Women in Wartime Industry 76

A Word with the UnAmerican Activities Committee 85

Phasing Out ESMWT 86

Professor May and Postwar Planning 87

V VOLUNTEER INTERESTS AND LEADERSHIP: 1945-1959 91

Social Agency Acquaintances 91

Professor May: Theorists Should Participate 93

The Lost Generation 94

Sierra Club 96
High Trips in the '30s 96
Environmental Issues 103

Women's Attitudes 105

Citizens' Committee on Adoptions 107
Origins and Membership 111
The Disappearing Orphanages 114
Foundation Grants 116
Shelter Care, Guardianship, and Other Concerns 117
Changing Public Attitudes 120

Bay Area United Crusade 123
Budget Panels 123
New Communities and New Needs 127

YWCA: Giving Asilomar to the State of California 128
National Board Decision 130
The Asilomar Foundation 132
The Legislature and the Governor 134

The Anti-Communist Era 138

VI LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA 140

World War II Years 140

Increasing Member Participation 144

Support for State Merit System 147

President: 1947-1949 149

Other Legislative Interests 150
Encouraging Party Responsibility 150
Child Care 151
Water Use: State and National 153

Passage and Repeal of Proposition 4 155

State and Local Mental Health Service 156

Legislative Relations 158

Public Finance Studies 159

Special Districts v. Regional Government 160

Continuing Responsibilities 162

More on Regional Government 169

VII THE ELECTIVE PROCESS IN BERKELEY 172

Deciding to Run for City Council 172

The Berkeley [Democratic] Caucus 174

Campaigning in 1959: Getting Organized 177

Expenses and Accounts 181

Seeking Endorsements 183

Campaign Materials and Strategy 185

Meeting Voters 188

Qualifications 195

Statements on Issues 197

Proposition C: A Questionable Fair Housing Proposal 201

Distinguished Advisers 206

The Need for Change 210

Election Returns 214

Women in Elective Office 218

VIII THE CITY COUNCIL IN 1959 222

On Becoming a Councilwoman 222

Fellow Councilmembers 223

City Staff 230

The Multitude of Everyday Decisions 233

Constituents and Ceremonial Events 236

Hopes for the Social and Physical Environment of the City 240

IX ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE LIBERAL MINORITY: 1959-1961

Salary and Recreation Requests 243

Establishing a Mental Health Program 246

Broadening Appointments to Boards and Commissions 247

New Scope for the Welfare Commission 250

Civic Art Commission 253

The Case of the Pilfered Bonsai 255

VOLUME II

X THE FAIR HOUSING STORY 257

1961: Liberal Majority Elected 257

Citizens' Committee to Study Discrimination in Housing 259

Council and Community Discussions 263

Housing Ordinance Approved 267

Housing Realities for Minorities 269

1963: Fair Housing Referendum 271

Candidates and Issues 273

Assemblyman Byron Rumford 279

Election Results 282

Afterthoughts 284

XI WORKING TOWARD AN INTEGRATED CITY 288

Citizen Appointments 289

Minority Recruiting and Employment 290

City Contracts 294

Contractor and Union Response 297

Housing Improvements: Rent Supplements and Code Enforcement 300

Economic Opportunity, Model Cities, and Ad Hoc Organizations 302

Park and Recreation Planning 306

Changing Community Requests: Saunas and Child Care 311

School Integration 313

Increasing Community Pressure from Black and White 315

Some Lessons Learned 320

XII ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION: THE WATERFRONT 322

Revising the Master Plan: Less Fill and More Public Access 322

Friends of Aquatic Park 325

Pros and Cons of Highrise and Harbor Development 329

Save-the-Bay Association Spearheads Public Opinion 332

City Council Discussions, 1961-63 335

Interim Waterfront Plan Adopted, 1964 337

XIII ABATING BLIGHT IN BERKELEY 340

Industrial Development and Urban Renewal 340

Revised Zoning Ordinance 342

South Campus Planning 346

Capital Improvement Program 349

Environmental and Political Aspects of Rapid Transit, Model Cities, Ashby Freeway 353

XIV BAY AREA RAPID TRANSIT DISTRICT: POLITICS AND PLANNING 356

1965 Election: Peg Gordon Joins the Liberal Majority 356

BART's Planning Process 360

Berkeley Decides to Bury the Tracks 362

Debates with BART Officials 363

Successful Bond Campaign, 1966 366

Junket to the Bottom of the Bay 369

XV THE UNIVERSITY AND CITY GOVERNMENT 371

Statewide and Local Perspectives 371

Committee on Urban Change: Problems of Planning and Communication 373

People's Park and Other Telegraph Avenue Concerns 377

Economic Concerns: Industry, Employee Residence, City Services 379

Student Activism 382
Peace Parades and Permits 382
Police Procedures 383
Community Attitudes 389

Young People's Involvement in the Community 390
Free Clinic 390
Own Recognizance Project 392
High School Issues 393

A Long View of Student Disturbances 395

XVI NEW POLITICAL WINDS 397

Third Council Campaign, 1967 397

Unfinished Business 399

Challenges on Environmental Issues 402

Priorities and the Pocketbook 404

Elections of 1969 and 1971 406

A Time to Leave the Council 410

Letters and Phone Calls from Constituents 412

Assistance with Council Duties 414

XVII LEGISLATIVE AND VOLUNTARY APPROACHES TO REGIONAL ORGANIZATION 418

Bay Area Transportation Study Commission: Membership 418

Massive Data for More Freeways 421

Citizens' Advisory Committee Recommends Alternatives to the Automobile 423

The Metropolitan Transportation Agency 427

Mayors' Approach to Regional Planning 429

County and Other Interests in Organizing the Association of Bay Area Governments 433

Citizen Input, Federal Funding, and Employment Opportunity 436

ABAG Executive Committee in Action 438

The Essence of ABAG 441

XVIII ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION 444

Environmental and Political Concerns 444

Appointing the First Commissioners: 1965 449

ABAG Appoints Mrs. May 455

BCDC Operations 459

Permit Powers and Enforcement 462

1969 Amendments: Implementation and Employment 465

The Case for Regionalization 467

Conflicts of Local, State, and Business Interest 470

Changing Attitudes 472

Relations with Other Agencies 474

Richard Clark Challenges Reappointment 477

Differences of Opinion on Environmental Issues 482

Housing Problems 484

XIX DILEMMAS OF PUBLIC POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEES 486

Search for Citizen Input 486

Berkeley Charter Review Committee 488

ABAG Citizens' Group 489

East Bay Regional Parks District Task Force 492

Contrasts and Comparisons 502

XX IN CONCLUSION 508

Accomplishments and Satisfactions of City Council Career 508

Regional Government Progress 511

Considerations for Prospective Candidates 515

Thank You 518

INDEX 520

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This two-volume memoir of Bernice Hubbard May was produced as one of the California Women Political Leaders oral history series. At the time the memoir was begun, there was no financing available for the project, only a draft proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. A generous gift from a close friend of Mrs. May's enabled the interview to get underway, and a small committee of her associates sought additional donations from mutual friends and political colleagues.

On behalf of future scholars, the Office wishes to thank the friends and colleagues of Mrs. May whose names are listed on the following page, especially Bartlett and Winifred Heard; Emily Huntington; Lucile H. Koshland; Agnes Robb, Philip H. Angell; George and Ruth Scheer; Earl and Virginia Simburg; Calvin and Doreen Townsend; the University of California, Berkeley Foundation; and one anonymous donor. Their combined contributions have made possible the production of this interview and stimulated the National Endowment for the Humanities to provide the matching grant which has allowed the Office to develop further the comprehensive project on California Women Political Leaders.

Malca Chall, Project Director
California Women Political Leaders
Oral History Project

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

15 January 1976
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

DONORS TO BERNICE HUBBARD MAY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Dr. and Mrs. David W. Allen
Mr. Phillip Angell
Mr. and Mrs. Spurgeon Avakian
Mrs. Gertrude Ballard
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Bodovitz
Mr. and Mrs. William T. Brown
Mr. and Mrs. Milton Chernin
Mr. and Mrs. Jack Citrin
Mrs. Winifred H. Cress
Mr. and Mrs. Ward Duffy
Mrs. Editha Dunn
Mr. and Mrs. R.A. Gordon
Mr. and Mrs. Walter Gordon
Mr. and Mrs. William C. Hanley
Mr. and Mrs. J.G. Hatfield
Mrs. Lauffer T. Hayes
Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett B. Heard
Mrs. Paul Heyneman
Dr. and Mrs. Paul Holmer
Dr. Emily Huntington
Mrs. William Irvine
Mr. and Mrs. Norman Jacobson
Mr. and Mrs. Eugene E. Jurs
Mrs. Sophie Kagel
Mr. Edward E. Kallgren
Dr. and Mrs. Clark Kerr
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kingman
Mrs. Daniel Koshland, Sr.
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Landau
Mr. Melvin B. Lane
Dr. and Mrs. Donald McLaughlin
Mr. and Mrs. Donald L. Foley
Mrs. E.O. Lawrence
Mr. and Mrs. Eugene C. Lee
Mr. and Mrs. George Lenczowski
Ms. Ellen St. S. Lifschutz
Mr. and Mrs. D.B. Luten
Mrs. Leon Z. Mandelson
Mr. and Mrs. Tom McLaren
Mr. and Mrs. W. John Miottel, Jr
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Nathan
Mrs. F.L. Naylor
Mr. and Mrs. Joel Y. Nemschoff
Dr. and Mrs. Felix H. Ocko
Mrs. Warren Olney III
Sen. Nicholas C. Petris
Mr. Robert W. Ratcliff
Miss Agnes Robb
Mr. and Mrs. Mellier G. Scott
Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Scalapino
Mr. and Mrs. George B. Scheer
Dr. and Mrs. Earl Simburg
Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Stoker
Hon. Wilmont Sweeney
Mr. and Mrs. Calvin K. Townsend
University of California, Berkel
Foundation
Mrs. Robert Vermilya
Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Weinreb
Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Wildavsky
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Williams
Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Wolfinger
Mr. and Mrs. Lester Zeigler
Bishop Roy C. Nichols

Names listed as printed on checks

PREFACE

The following interview is one of a series of tape-recorded memoirs in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History project. This is the second phase of the Women in Politics project, the first of which dealt with the experiences of eleven women who had been leaders or rank-and-file workers in the suffrage movement.

This series of interviews has been designed to study the political activities of a selected group of prominent California women who became active in politics during the years between the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the current feminist movement--roughly the years between 1920 and 1960. The women are Republicans, Democrats, independents, and members of splinter parties. A few aspired to public office and were defeated; a few have been elected or appointed; others have worked as political leaders in local offices, convention halls, and along the campaign trails to help elect their candidates to important political positions.

While the experiences of each woman are, of course, unique, as a whole these first-hand observations provide primary source material into the varying backgrounds, attitudes, and insights of women who achieved political prominence in an era when politics, at least at the higher levels, was considered the sole province of men. In addition they provide scholars with valuable historical information on details of party organization and the men and women who served in the party structures at the county, state, and national levels, the processes of selecting party leaders, raising funds, and drafting platforms, and the more subtle aspects of political life such as maintaining harmony, coping with jealousies, geographical dissensions, and fatigue, and the pleasures of friendships, triumphs, and struggles in a common cause.

The California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project has been financed by donations from individuals interested in this project, from friends and colleagues of individual memoirists, and by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Malca Chall, Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

1 January 1976
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

PREFACE

The following interview is one of a series of tape-recorded memoirs in the California Women Political Leaders Oral History project. This is the second phase of the Women in Politics project, the first of which dealt with the experiences of eleven women who had been leaders or rank-and-file workers in the suffrage movement.

This series of interviews has been designed to study the political activities of a selected group of prominent California women who became active in politics during the years between the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the current feminist movement--roughly the years between 1920 and 1960. The women are Republicans, Democrats, independents, and members of splinter parties. A few aspired to public office and were defeated; a few have been elected or appointed; others have worked as political leaders in local offices, convention halls, and along the campaign trails to help elect their candidates to important political positions.

While the experiences of each woman are, of course, unique, as a whole these first-hand observations provide primary source material into the varying backgrounds, attitudes, and insights of women who achieved political prominence in an era when politics, at least at the higher levels, was considered the sole province of men. In addition they provide scholars with valuable historical information on details of party organization and the men and women who served in the party structures at the county, state, and national levels, the processes of selecting party leaders, raising funds, and drafting platforms, and the more subtle aspects of political life such as maintaining harmony, coping with jealousies, geographical dissensions, and fatigue, and the pleasures of friendships, triumphs, and struggles in a common cause.

The California Women Political Leaders Oral History Project has been financed by donations from individuals interested in this project, from friends and colleagues of individual memoirists, and by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in the history of the West and the nation. The Office is under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, Director of The Bancroft Library.

Malca Chall, Director
Women in Politics Oral History Project

1 January 1976
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

INTRODUCTION

For some twenty-five years, my friendship with Bernice Hubbard May has been one of the most valued and enriching experiences of my life. Her judgment, her knowledge of people, her ability to separate the important from the trivial, her courage and her humor have and still do fill me with awe. It has been a rare privilege to know her and to have shared in a few of her significant achievements.

To the perceptive observer, the child often foreshadows the adult. This must have been true of Bernice Hubbard May, for at an early age she was recognized for her intellectual prowess. By 1912 her next door neighbor, George Scheer, reports that although she was younger than some of her family and neighbor boys, "she was ahead because of her brain." "She wasn't very good at billiards though." When she graduated from Berkeley High School in 1914 she was the valedictorian for the women students and Ritchie McKee, valedictorian for the men, remembers that she was quiet, not opinionated but with opinions, well reasoned and firm.

After graduation from the University of California, Bernice had a distinguished career as executive secretary of the University Extension Division and as assistant director, Engineering, Science and Management War Training at the University. Undoubtedly, however, the turning point in her life was meeting and marrying Professor Samuel C. May. Appropriately they met on one of the Sierra Club mountain trips and quickly discovered mutual concerns for conservation issues, for students, and a host of other interests which resulted in their marriage in Virginia City, Nevada on December 13, 1940.

Wartime activities took much of Bernice's time, but there were many hours left for opening their home to a great group of friends and students. Sam May was one of the pioneers in the field of public administration and his tireless work resulted in the adoption by Berkeley of a city manager type of government and his election in 1923 as city councilman. When Bernice was later elected to membership on the City Council she and Sam became the only husband and wife team to have served Berkeley in this capacity.

When the war years and its strenuous demands were over, the Mays in 1949 built their charming home at 16 Roble Road in part of the Duncan McDuffie estate among the rhododendrons and fauna for which the estate was world-renowned. We had built our home in 1934 in another part of the estate just across the little private road and we soon became friends and

neighbors with many common interests. We enjoyed seeing groups of students wending their way down the little road to counsel with Sam and Bernice and we shared in the shock and sorrow of Sam's sudden death in New York, on September 30th, 1955. In spite of this devastating loss, Bernice returned to Berkeley and went on with her involvement in community affairs.

It was in the 1940s that she also became active in the League of Women Voters. Sam had been a member and as soon as Bernice retired from her University Extension job, Mildred Brown alerted Ruth Scheer to "latch on to Bernice for the League." From 1947-1949 Bernice served as state president of the League succeeding Ruth Scheer. This experience was valuable training for Bernice as a person to be reckoned with in Sacramento.

Berkeley City Council, 1959-1971

Jack Kent in his tribute to Bernice on her retirement, describes so beautifully the special contribution Bernice made as a member of the City Council that it would be a duplication to repeat much of it here,* but the first paragraph deserves inclusion:

> "In April Vote for May" The springlike freshness of this Berkeley bumper sticker of 1959 sounded just the right note at the time it appeared. As events later proved, Bernice May's enlivening and successful campaign was one of the most positive signs of the coming of age of a new season -- a new state in the life of the Berkeley community. Politically, Berkeley was about to wake up.

Mr. Kent points out that the important decision which Bernice made in this campaign, to associate herself with the then only four year old Caucus of Democratic Clubs and the Democratic party precinct organization which was also an infant, meant giving up some of her non-partisan support. But the decision was characteristic of her "commitment to carrying out a definite program aimed at doing something constructive about important community needs."

The list of her achievements during these first two terms continued and expanded in her 1965-1971 period of service. These were the years of vigorous dissent and violence in Berkeley; of disruption in the council meetings; riots and rallies on city streets. All of us recall the seizure by a group of young people of property belonging to the University for

---

*Bernice Hubbard May - A Tribute by Her Friends and Associates, April, 1971.

a "People's Park" -- a controversy still unresolved. Through all these and many other tense and difficult situations Bernice never "lost her cool."

In 1971 Bernice decided not to run for reelection, citing a need for "new voices and a rotation of viewpoints and abilities," but she could point with pride to a long list of accomplishments which the City Council had made during her tenure -- getting non-barrack-like public housing for Berkeley, an emergency mental health clinic, emergency day-care for sick children with working mothers, more minority and female representation on city boards and commissions, three Olympic-size pools scattered throughout the city, and firm plans for a methadone clinic for drug addicts.

Retirement from the City Council did not mean inactivity for Bernice -- just continued work and leadership in organizations such as the San Francisco Bay Association, ABAG, East Bay Regional Park District task force, many civic and social organizations, and of course keeping an open door for students and friends.

Asilomar

My own friendship and close association with Bernice began in 1949 when she and Sam became our neighbors on Roble Road. One of the activities in which I had been deeply involved since 1928 was the operation of the Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove, owned by the national board of the YWCA. Over the years the YWCA had disposed of all other conference grounds owned by it. Asilomar remained because some of us were determined to save it for the people of California who knew and loved it. From 1928 to 1969 we tried in various ways to assure its continuance as a conference grounds. The tale of those years is too long to tell here. Suffice it to say that in 1945 the national board agreed to turn the management and responsibility over to an Asilomar Committee for a period of twenty years -- made us a loan of $200,000 to be repaid at the rate of $10,000 annually with interest at 2% and all operating expenses to be assumed by the California Committee.

When Bernice moved to Roble Road, I immediately asked her to become a member of the committee. I knew that she had been active in the student YWCA and had attended student conferences at Asilomar. Little did we know then how strategic her membership on the committee was to be. In 1949, a State Recreation Commission was appointed and as a member I came to know Mr. Joseph Knowland, chairman of the Division of Beaches and Parks, and Mr. Newton Drury, its director, and we began to work with them on the idea of selling Asilomar to the state. We worked out an agreement by which the

state would buy Asilomar, restricting the dune area as a wilderness preserve, and turning over the operation of the remainder of the grounds as a conference area for a period of twenty years to an Asilomar Foundation without expense to the state, and that I would be the chairman. So a dauntless quintet composed of Bernice May, Maude Empey, Helen Grant, Elizabeth Gordon, and I set up the Asilomar Foundation in November 1952 and continued our responsibility for Asilomar. Things went smoothly for a few months and we made a series of renovations and improvements and were moving toward concluding the sale when John Pierce, State Director of Finance, suddenly announded that the whole deal was off. This set off an uproar all over the state and just about everyone who had ever been to Asilomar got into the act. The Asilomar Foundation and especially Bernice and I really went to work. Bernice was well known in Sacramento legislative circles because of her League of Women Voters service and her prominence in the Democratic party. I was a Republican, a member of the State Recreation Commission originally appointed by Governor Warren and reappointed by Governor Knight. Both of us had the help of Mr. Knowland and Newton Drury who were determined to acquire Asilomar for the state, so we were not without influence in Sacramento.

Our first move was to call on Governor Knight who promised us that he would approve the purchase if we could get a bill through the legislature. Senator Fred Farr of Carmel and Assemblyman Pattee of Salinas introduced such a bill which passed unanimously in both houses. Due to Mr. Pierce's continued opposition, the governor pocket vetoed the bill. This infuriated Mr. Knowland and our Asilomar Foundation and made us more determined than ever to fight on. Mr. Pierce had several objections and nothing we could do or say made him change his mind. He really believed that a small group of women could not operate the grounds without financial assistance; that Asilomar would require additional funds from the state for rehabilitation; that Asilomar would become a political football and that the Asilomar Foundation was in effect a way by which the YWCA would continue its operation.

My notes for 1955 indicate that Bernice and I spent many hours in Sacramento, in consultation with Mr. Knowland and Mr. Drury, and it was finally made clear to Mr. Pierce that we were not going to give up. It was also clear that some solution which Mr. Pierce would accept had to be found, and so the Asilomar Foundation withdrew as the operating agent and relinquished that responsibility to the City of Pacific Grove. Thus on July 1, 1955 Asilomar became the property of the State of California under the same terms as those which the Asilomar Foundation had accepted.

For those of us who had worked for so many years to preserve Asilomar as a conference grounds, that afternoon was an emotion-laden occasion. Looking back I often wonder why we did all this, but Mr. Pierce's opposition only strengthened our resolve. The responsibilities we had taken on at various times were frightening and there were many who questioned our

judgment. We fought on because Asilomar had influenced the lives of each of us. It had a deep significance which we wanted to preserve for ourselves and extend to others. We prized the opportunities which Asilomar gave for freedom of inquiry, association with like-minded and persons different from ourselves; leaders whose ideas shaped our own, the experience of the out-of-doors in all its beauty and majesty and the spiritual enrichment which was always part of any stay at Asilomar. Bernice was a tower of strength through all our struggle and Mr. Knowland's words in accepting the gift, "Of all the gifts the state has received, I have never accepted any with greater pleasure,"gladdened our hearts. Asilomar continues as a conference grounds without expense to the state, serving an ever widening group of conferences, under the able direction of Roma Philbrook whom we recruited and helped train.

World Affairs

In 1955, a group of us who were long time members of the World Affairs Council of Northern California, organized a study group which met at our house. We chose our study topics, assigned papers to be written by members, required background reading and participation in discussion. Professor Robert Scalapino was our first moderator and members included such congenial friends as the George Scheers, Paul Heynemans, Raymond Peters, Stacy Dobrzenskys, David Dunlaps, Allan Blaisdells, Ernest Spiegels, George Vureks, Helen Douglas, Bernice May and others; a stimulating and erudite group in which papers given by Bernice were always outstanding. The topics which we chose were usually related to the subject of the annual conference at Asilomar and gave us background for asking questions. Some of the topics seem equally relevant today; included were "Problems of Development in the New Nations in Africa,""East Asia, Politics and Growth," "Russian Relationships with other parts of the world" in which Bernice did the paper on Russia and France. In 1966 she did the paper on Sino-Soviet conflict in our study on "U.S. Foreign Policy." Other topics which are of current interest include our study of "Crisis" specifically related to European countries and the one on "Political Revolutions and U.S. Policy."

For many years most of us have attended the World Affairs Conference at Asilomar where we round up our "Berkeley Gang" for an after evening session to test our ability to handle knotty questions posed to conference leaders or ones which we have made up ourselves. One such evening sharply illustrated Bernice's keen sense of humor and superb political sense. The Dobrzenskys had developed the questions and the one which Bernice drew was: "If you were the Mayor of West Berlin and it had just been announced that the Berlin Wall had been taken down, what would you say? Without an instant's hesitation Bernice replied, "I DID IT."

Those of us who have known Bernice May as a friend, neighbor, confidant, co-worker and citizen extraordinary, are proud and enriched by our association with her. We have turned to her in times of joy and in times of sorrow and we give thanks for the contribution Bernice Hubbard May has made to each of us and to the world.

From her friend and neighbor,
Winifred Heard
(Mrs. Bartlett Heard)

March, 1975

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Winifred Heard's introduction to the memoirs of Bernice Hubbard May gives an affectionate account of Mrs. May's impact on her friends and the life of her community. The memoir itself is a lively narrative of the experiences and accomplishments of a woman who understood and skillfully used the political process to further public understanding and implementation of new social concepts during the mid-twentieth century decades when major changes occurred in the practice and organization of local government. Her awareness and blithe handling of the hazards and advantages of being a woman in politics are an entertaining and illuminating thread throughout the manuscript. Her descriptions of her three successful campaigns for city council together form a remarkable guide to how to get elected.

In her years on the council, Mrs. May had the gift of knowing clearly what she wanted to accomplish: a socially-responsive majority on the council, a racially-integrated community, improvement in the physical quality of life, saving the San Franciso Bay and open green space, and working out regional solutions to regional problems. She saw progress in each of these efforts, although she speaks of disappointments such as the defeat of the Fair Housing ordinance of 1963, some of the directions taken in regional planning, and the emergence of new viewpoints to challenge the methods and purposes which liberal Democrats had worked to achieve in the 1960s. Although there are differences of opinion about the goals and methods Mrs. May stood for, as on every public issue, her comments are a valuable record of the dedication and vitality an able woman can bring to local government.

* * * * * *

The Regional Oral History Office had long hoped to record Mrs. May's memoir; it became a matter of urgency early in 1974 when friends reported her serious illness. With the urging and support of a group of these friends, particularly Mrs. Heard, the interviews were begun within a few weeks and continued as Mrs. May's health permitted.

As in everything she undertook, Mrs. May was an active participant in this oral history project. Although her health was failing, her recollections were not. When it became clear that she would have the strength to complete the narration of her career, she gently took control of the discussions, developing the points she wished to make and selecting

the anecdotes and personalities to bring the structure to life, occasionally chiding the interviewer for missing a point, sometimes addressing those who will read her story.

The interview sessions were tape-recorded in the spacious living room of the contemporary home she and her husband, UC's distinguished Samuel C. May, had built on Roble Road, Berkeley. Twenty-five conversations were recorded, from March 20 through December 11, 1974. Many of them included a break for tea, and conversation on then-current political events. The transcripts were rough-edited as they came from the transcriber and were given to Mrs. May in batches of several related chapters. She was able to review the first sixteen chapters before she died in May, 1975, and added a number of details and comments to that portion. The final four chapters were reviewed and approved by her son Kenneth May, now on the faculty of the University of Toronto, while the memorial service was being arranged.

As the interviews progressed, Mrs. May also took the time to go through her papers, which she gave to the University of California. The extensive collection of publications related to her service on the Berkeley City Council, Association of Bay Area Governments, and Bay Conservation and Development Commission are in the library of the Institute of Governmental Studies, founded by Samuel May. The personal collection, largely her election working papers and campaign materials for 1959-1971, is in The Bancroft Library.

Gabrielle Morris,
Interviewer-Editor

15 October 1975
Regional Oral History Office
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California at Berkeley

Vita

Bernice Hubbard May

B.A., University of California, Berkeley, 1918

Professional positions

Executive Secretary, University of California Extension Division, 1923-1940

Assistant Director, Engineering, Science, and Management War Training, University of California, 1941-1945

Volunteer activities

Member, Board of Directors, League of Women Voters of California, 1940-1941, 1945-1946, and 1950-1957

President, League of Women Voters of California, 1947-1949

Members, Citizens' Committee on Adoptions in California, 1943-1950

Member, YWCA Management Committee for Asilomar, 1949-1953

Member, Board of Directors, California Conference of Social Work, 1949-1954

Vice President, California Conservation Council, 1950-1952

Member, Budget Committee, Alameda County United Fund, 1953-1958

Member, various budget panels, United Bay Area Crusade, 1956-1963

Member, Board of Directors, Travelers Aid Society of Alameda County, 1956-1959

Member, Board of Directors, Family Service Agency of Berkeley, 1959-1962

Member, Board of Directors, Prytanean Alumni Association, 1943-1945

Member, Citizens' Committee for Postwar Planning

Member, National Committee on Results of War Training, War Manpower Commission, 1945

Member, Board of Directors, Women's Faculty Club, 1942-1948

Member, United Bay Area Bylaws Committee for the Bay Area Social Planning Council, 1959

Member, Berkeley Citizens' Committee for the Aging, 1958

Public service

Member, Berkeley City Council, 1959-1971

Member, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 1966-1967 and 1968-1971

Member, Executive Committee, Association of Bay Area Governments, 1968-1971

Member, Bay Area Transportation Commission, 1968-1971

Berkeley Gazette, 12 May 1975

Memorial service for Bernice May

Memorial services for Bernice Hubbard May, for Berkeley city councilwoman and a dominant figure in city politics from 1959 to 1971, were pending today.

She died Friday in an Oakland hospital after a lengthy illness.

Mrs. May won her first term on the Berkeley city council in 1959, associating herself with the then four-year-old Caucus of Democratic Clubs and the newly formed Democratic Precinct Organization.

BERNICE HUBBARD MAY

The groups were springboards that helped the city's liberal Democrats gain control of the city council in 1961.

During the next 10 years, she and other liberal members of the council pushed through several far-reaching measures and programs, among them, the appointment of a Committee on Discrimination in Housing in Berkeley.

The committee's findings were used to formulate Berkeley's Fair Housing Ordinance which was defeated, however, in the 1963 city elections.

She was re-elected to the city council in 1963 and 1967 and served continuously until her retirement in 1971.

During her last two years as a city council member she sat on the council's committees on capital improvements, public information, municipal revenue, rapid transit and architectural selection.

Also during her tenure as a city council member, she figured prominently in the School Recall election of 1964, when school board cancidates, backed by liberal Democrats, won and paved the way for integration in Berkeley schools.

Active in regional government, she aligned herself with the Save San Francisco Bay Association and was instrumental in the establishment of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission in 1965.

She was later appointed to the commission in 1968 by Governor Reagan and served on it until 1971.

From 1968 to 1971, she also served on the executive committee of the Association of Bay Area Governments and was a member of the Bay Area Transportation Commission.

Mrs. May, a native of Colusa County, California, attended Emerson Elementary School here and graduated from Berkeley High School.

She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of California, Berkeley in 1918 with a bachelor of arts degree in economics.

From 1923 to 1940 she worked as an executive secretary with the University of California's extension division.

During World War II, she served as assistant director to the University's Engineering Science and Management War Training program, a specialized manpower training program set up to fill in the needs of the war construction industry.

She was president of the California League of Women Voters from 1947 to 1949, and sat as a board director on that organization from 1940-41; 1945-46, and 1950-57.

She also served as board director for other organizations including the California Conference of Social Work, 1949-54; Travelers Aid Society of Alameda County, 1956-59; Family Service Agency of Berkeley, 1959-62; Prytanean Alumni Association, 1943-45; Women's Faculty Club, 1942-48.

Other memberships included the Citizens' Committee on Adoptions in California, 1943-50; YWCA Management Committee for Asilomar, 1949-53; Budget Committee of the Alameda County United Fund, 1953-58; budget panels of the United Bay Area Crusade, 1956-63; Citizens' Committee for Postwar Planning; National Committee on Results of War Training, War Manpower Commission, 1945; United Bay Area Bylaws Committee for the Bay Area Social Planning Council, 1959; and the Berkeley Citizens' Committee for the Aging, 1958.

She also served as vice president of the California Conservation Council from 1950 to 1952 and was a life member of the Sierra Club.

Mrs. May was the widow of Professor Samuel C. May, founder of UC Berkeley's Departmental Bureau of Public Administration.

Survivors include sons, Randolph P. May of Sacramento, and Dr. Kenneth O. May of Toronto, Can.; sister, Kathryn H. Switzer of Sacramento; brother, William H. Hubbard, Jr., of Redwood City, Calif.; three grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Services are pending at McNary and Morgan Chapel.

San Francisco Chronicle, 11 May 1975

Bernice May Berkeley politician

- Bernice Hubbard May, one of the best-known and most respected women politicians in California's history, is dead.

Mrs. May, a Berkeley city councilwoman from 1959 until her retirement at age 73 just four years ago, died Friday of cancer.

Born in Colusa County, Mrs. May was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of California at Berkeley in economics.

Her longtime interest and later career in politics started with her marriage to Prof. Samuel C. May, founder of the Bureau of Public Administration at UC and one of the framers of the Berkeley City Charter.

Mrs. May first ran for the Berkeley council three years after her husband's death. She won re-election consistently until she chose to retire.

During those years she also served on the San Fmacisco Bay Conservation Development Commission, the Bay Area Transportation Study Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments.

Earlier, she had been president of the California League of Women Voters. Mrs. May was administrative officer at UC from 1923 to 1945 and was a life member of the Sierra Club.

She is survived by two sons, Randolph, of Sacramento and Kenneth, of Toronto; a sister, Kathryn Switzer of Sacramento, and a brother, William H. Hubbard Jr., of Redwood City.

Memorial services are planned.

I PRELIMINARY CONVERSATION
(Date of Interview: March 20, 1974)

Thoughts on Local Politics

Morris: Would you like to look through this memoir by Harry Kingman*? I thought it would give you an idea of how we work.

[Mrs. May leafs through manuscript volume.]

B. May: Unlike Ruth and Harry [Kingman], who adopted democratic citizenship as a theme early and stuck to it, I've done a variety of things which were unrelated to politics, though democratic in character. Because of my husband's position with IGS and my own long employment at the university, I wasn't active in politics until after I retired, and my husband was dead. My political career was a local one. Once elected, I was invited to run for offices outside of Berkeley, because political parties are always looking for candidates, especially when winning is doubtful. I preferred a solid block of experience on one governmental level. You can't begin in your fifties to start out to be president or governor or even a very useful member of a large legislature.

I was interested primarily in Berkeley politics because of the problems of integration and the enthusiasm and childlike faith of many people -- the Democrats, at any rate, who were active in Berkeley politics -- that we could have an integrated city, and that we could do it in perhaps eight or nine years. We were mistaken on timing, but I feel that discrimination would have deepened if we hadn't tried at all. We don't know. We

---

*Harry L. Kingman, Citizenship in a Democracy, The Bancroft Library, University of California/Berkeley, 1973.

B. May: certainly contributed to the rising wave of expectations, to which we had neither the money nor the skilled personnel to respond. One of my remaining black friends said to me not long ago, "Well, you know we wouldn't have voted for you if we hadn't thought you'd do something!"

Morris: You certainly did do something and you certainly got things started. That's for sure.

B. May: Yes. Just as Harry Truman says, "There's no need thinking about what would have happened if you'd done it differently, because that would have changed the whole situation. You can't take that into account."*

Another way of underscoring the futility of speculating on past decisions is Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." The road we choose to travel determines what we see -- and can tell.

Morris: In the 1950s many people became active in politics for the first time in Adlai Stevenson's campaigns; some of this support carried over to Dick Graves' campaign for governor in 1954. Was this a factor in your becoming a candidate?

B. May: No, I wasn't involved in the Stevenson or Graves' campaigns. Dick, an old friend without prior experience in politics, was defeated for governor in 1954.**

How much, or should we decide this as we go along, should we talk of the question of legally nonpartisan elections in a situation which is, as then in Berkeley, primarily partisan?

Morris: I think this is a very interesting question. It's one of the first questions I heard when I became interested in Berkeley politics as a resident here. Some of your League of Women Voters' experience might have some bearing on that.

---

*The comment Mrs. May remembered is as follows on p. 201 of Merle Miller's Plain Speaking: "If you've done the best you can -- if you've done what you have to do -- there is no use worrying about it because nothing can change it ... What you're going to do is more important than what you have done."

**See Richard Graves' memoir, Theoretician, Advocate and Candidate in California State Government, in The Bancroft Library.

B. May: You run for office and the league's pleased, but they advise you just as they might anybody else. In fact, they're a little wary of you!

Morris: I think that within the league and within the women's movement as a part of American politics, there's been continuing discussion, hasn't there, about whether it is better to have politics run on a partisan basis, with party discipline and party loyalty and continuity in political situations, or whether it is better to have a "nonpartisan, independent" approach to local government?*

B. May: No, I think not. Most other states have party primaries or party nominations.

Morris: From what I've read, your particular experience in Berkeley politics was at a point when the party kind of loyalty --

B. May: Yes, very strong. But the trick is to maintain it without the support of direct connections with the ongoing planning of the party. Also, with local, indigenous party organizations, at least Democratic ones, you had to fend off the boys from Sacramento. They hadn't helped you one bit in your campaigning, but once elected they wished to tell you what to do and what not to do. For instance, [Jesse] Unruh tried to stop us from passing the fair housing ordinance in Berkeley because of the great harm he felt it might be to the party in the state.

Morris: Oh, I see.

B. May: And we said, "Well, that's too bad." Greatly to Byron's [Rumford] credit, he never did. He supported fair housing in Berkeley and Sacramento and that resulted in part in his being done out of his state senatorship by reapportionment.

Morris: Interrelate and overlap, yes. Those are things that are extremely important, both in terms of the legislative process and then how that reflects what's going on in the community.

B. May: Yes. It was all very fine when we had the votes and the organization and the ongoing enthusiasm -- we could afford to stick out our tongues at Unruh and others. But in a time like

---

*William Henry Chafe, The American Woman, Oxford University Press, 1972.

B. May: the present, when the local party feeling is low -- I don't know whether voters are weary of well-doing, or Watergate, or whatever --

So, but you think the mechanics of campaigning --

Morris: Are very important.

B. May: And that the place of women in campaigns is important. And what I say will be unpopular. On the whole, women aren't willing to take the guff of campaigning to be elected. They like to make the sandwiches and the cookies and the coffee! They really do, Gaby!

Morris: That could well be.

B. May: This is putting a story out of place, but when I worked during World War II, instead of being a pink lady,* my husband got much sympathy, to which his reply was, "I regret I have only one wife to give to my country." I tired of hearing this and said to him one day, "That's an awfully old gag." He said, "Oh, that's not a gag at all. That's a test. When people stop laughing at it, then I will know that women behave like and are accepted as persons."

Morris: I see, yes.

B. May: My experience with the women who've helped me in politics was that they wanted to do the behind-the-scene things, and they worked very hard as volunteers. A number of employed women gave me important volunteer help which replaced staff in press relations, issue material, and the like. Their names appear in the campaign material accompanying this report, so I'll only mention one example, the Livermore Rad Lab physicist Margaret Gee, who took excellent pictures as a volunteer press photographer. Some of them wanted appointments to the various boards and commissions, of course, but it was exceedingly difficult to get women to run.

Margaret Gordon was my major gift to Berkeley and she only lasted one term, poor darling, because of her professional career.**

---

*hospital volunteer

**Dr. Margaret Gordon (a distinguished research economist -- see Who's Who) made a great contribution to Berkeley in 1963-1967 as a councilman with special concern for the rational development of Berkeley and for services for Berkeley residents, including the disadvantaged. I hope she will some day add her evaluation of women in politics to this series. BHM

B. May: But she was the only woman I ever helped to persuade to run for office.

Morris: That's interesting. I recently saw a tabulation of all the people who had been on the city council in Berkeley back into the 1800s and there's almost always been at least one woman on the council.

B. May: If you look at the record, she's almost always been appointed from Republican women's organizations.

Morris: To complete somebody's term?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: And then did not run on her own?

B. May: Then you can run as an incumbent and it was much easier to be elected. Most women appointees did not run; some did. But this was a Berkeley tradition. There were once three appointed women members of the council.

Morris: Yes. In addition to women generally not wanting to take the guff of campaigning, is there any resistance among men that you've observed to work for a woman's election?

B. May: No. I would say that I had more support, and certainly more money, from men, more practical help from men.

Morris: Did anybody ever raise the question about, "Why should we endorse Bernice? She's a woman and we've got this perfectly good man?"

B. May: No. I ran first at the urging of Democratic liberals, because I liked their platform for Berkeley. The Berkeley Caucus* endorsed and helped liberal candidates and avoided vote splitting by asking those seeking its endorsement to agree not to run if not chosen.

When I appeared the first time, in 1958, an example of the willingness at that time in Berkeley, among men to push women, as they were also pushing blacks, was Zack Brown [William T.].

---

*Organization of local Democratic clubs.

B. May: Better known in the Caucus than I, Zack appeared as being willing to run in 1959, but learning that there was a woman who seemed to him to be qualified, he withdrew his name because he thought it would be more useful to have a woman. Since it was so seldom a qualified woman candidate appeared, he would wait two more years. And he did and we elected him in 1961.

Morris: That was very gallant of him.

B. May: Yes. That's why Berkeley politics were exciting, because there was at that time a strong feeling that what we wanted was a much more inclusive government and that women and minority groups should be represented. Women are the only majority I ever heard of who pretend to be a minority, and I never speak of them as such!

The Negro Community

Morris: Yes. Were there black candidates also involved in your first campaign?

B. May: I've always run with a black candidate, every time.*

Morris: Every single time?

B. May: Every single time for three elections. In 1959 Democratic candidates were in some difficulty because the candidate who we all thought was tops was Roy Nichols. There was a short-term vacancy and four, four-year terms. We gave Roy his choice because several of us were not -- I was not going to run even in a field against a Negro. I was sure that this would so split the vote that neither of us would be elected.

---

*On reading this section, I find I have remembered my strong intentions rather than the facts. I ran with Roy Nichols in 1961 and Ronald V. Dellums in 1969. In 1963 the Caucus had endorsed a well-qualified black candidate who unfortunately had to withdraw for personal reasons just before the filing date -- too late to replace. So I had many black supporters but no black running mate in the 1963 Fair Housing referendum campaign. BHM

B. May: Roy, because Methodist ministers are moved frequently, thought that he should go for the two year. I was too naive to know, but this was probably a mistake. Some of the more experienced said, "It would be easier to elect him from a field than one-to-one against a white man." He ran against Dean [Hurford] Stone from the university and made a very credible run, but lost.

I had thought that Berkeley was a city in which, although there wasn't much socializing or fraternizing, there was not an overt or deep residue of prejudice. But later one of the great lady benefactors of Berkeley gave a candidates' party for all of the liberal candidates. Roy Nichols and I went about to meetings together. One of us would be speaking at one house meeting while the other would be at another place and then we'd exchange. So, after this meeting in North Berkeley was over, Roy helped me on with my coat and said, "If you'll go to So-and-So's first, I'll be there as soon as I can, but I've got a church meeting and we're going to start late. So be prepared to talk quite a while."

I said, "Okay, Roy. I'll do my best." He patted me on the shoulder and said, "Okay, dear. See you tonight," and went out the door. Then one of the Hill ladies,* an old friend who I'd always thought was liberal, said, "Why, Bernice, that man doesn't even know he's a Negro!"

Morris: Isn't that interesting! This was early in --

B. May: This was in '59. Other incidents should have clued us in on the gap between liberal words and action.

Morris: Did it work the other way? Did you feel any prejudice against yourself as a white woman in the Negro community?

B. May: Not at that time. I do now. It's not that I feel prejudice against me as a person, but blacks no longer trust not just me, but the whole circumstance, the whole situation. They don't sign petitions, for example, and they don't endorse. I would say that fully over a third of my house meetings, through my

---

*"Hill" refers to north and east hilly sections of the city, with predominantly white population in the 1950s and 60s. "The Flats" generally referred to south and west Berkeley near the Bay, where the majority of the Negro population lived. Ed.

B. May: last campaign in 1967, were in Negro homes, and I doubt very much those people would open their homes now. There's been too much rough retaliation and fear of violence.

In that last campaign, I had some fairly rough house meetings in which the young radical groups were attacking -- for example, they attacked the proposed purchase of the Santa Fe tracks as being a sinister plot to help the Santa Fe. I remember one house meeting where in a black home their language and threats were rough. I left to go to another meeting. The hostess came out to the porch with me, shut the door very carefully and said, "You know, Mrs. May, we wanted to hear the young men. But don't worry; we're going to vote for you! Don't worry. We really don't like the way they talk."

In my early campaigns, we had a fine time. Committee meetings were integrated. Money came from black and white. It wasn't roses, roses all the way, because very often people didn't do things that we thought, or hoped, they would do. But I consider myself very fortunate to have been in local politics when it was friendly and not fighting.

Morris: On the upswing, you might say.

B. May: Yes. I'm not implying there were no disagreements. There were. But there wasn't bitter in-fighting.

Morris: There were Democratic clubs in various neighborhoods. Were these based on precincts?

B. May: No. They were based on friendship, meeting night, major interests, and had no or little neighborhood or precinct character. There was a precinct workers' organization, but mainly for the technical work of getting precinct lists, recruiting workers and so on. Some clubs were further to the left than others and some were very much more conservative.

Then CDC [California Democratic Council] fell to pieces, and was no longer a tie to state party activities. Berkeley clubs related to issues and candidates -- and not neighborhoods.

Morris: That's interesting. Would there then have been some clubs with primarily Negro members?

B. May: I don't remember that there were. Blacks usually joined a going club. Now they have black organizations. I think it was in 1969 that the Black Caucus was organized.

Morris: Going back to '59, how had Roy Nichols become interested in becoming a candidate?

B. May: We recruited him. It was a strange kind of recruitment, because I think now there should have been more participation by politically experienced whites. From the beginning, whites for integration tended to let the more or less traditional Democratic leadership pick one black candidate.

Morris: The traditional black Democratic leadership?

B. May: Yes. D.G. Gibson, Frankie Jones, Byron [Rumford], NAACP members, et cetera. Our interest was not to impose anyone on them. Again, that's a decision difficult to evaluate because whites did not know the range of possible black candidates who perhaps could have benefited by liberal political experience before their final decision to run. Roy Nichols, however, was widely known because he had been active in community life.

Morris: In things outside of his own church?

B. May: Yes. He was the pastor at Downs Memorial, which had, at that time, a wide black and white membership.

Morris: Roy Nichols was elected to the school board in '61. I was wondering if there was any overlap between the people who were looking for candidates to make some changes in Board of Education policies and the people who were involved in making some changes in city council.

B. May: No, because non-partisan school elections were then, and are now, felt to be essential for a free democracy with schools free of indoctrination. In Berkeley in 1959 and 1963 individuals for an integrated city worked in both school and city campaigns but this was the only common issue.

We were disappointed in 1961 to lose Roy as a council candidate, but he had decided that education was more interesting to him and was elected to the school board. We had a winning Negro candidate for council in 1961, Bill Sweeney, and elected him.*

---

*The first black councilman elected in California was Wilmont Sweeney, attorney, graduate Cal-Berkeley, Hastings Law School, admitted to practice U.S. Supreme Court. Appointed judge, Berkeley-Albany Municipal Court, for term commencing 1975. BHM

Morris: Yes. Was he selected by the same people in the black community?

B. May: Yes. He's Frankie Jones' nephew by marriage. At that time there was a group, the wives, elders, and church people, who were attempting to find blacks to bring forward and to push for elective office.

Morris: Were these black families that had been in Berkeley for a generation or so, or were they more recent?

B. May: No, then most were old Berkeley and NAACP especially. There was at that time, in 1959, what exists no longer, prestige in having come to Berkeley before the war, before the influx of World War II workers.

Morris: I've heard that expressed occasionally by younger women who are third- and fourth-generation Negroes in California. When you say "prestige," you mean that the people who had come from the South or Texas during the war looked up to the pre-war Berkeley Negroes?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: That's interesting. Do you know whether this went as far as the older residents looked after the newcomers in any way or helped them get settled here?

B. May: No, it was impossible numerically, because of the tremendous influx of Negroes for war industry.

Morris: Yes, this is referred to in the textbooks, that there were trainloads of them brought out for the shipyards and whatnot. Were these Negroes trained in the war training programs that you did at the university?

B. May: It was not a source of many students because we trained for professional and sub-professional positions. There was no bar against Negroes, but unfortunately very few of them had qualifications to enter in the first place, with the exception of a few entering positions, like junior draftsman. As is the university itself, the Extension Division courses were and are open to all races.

II FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD
(Date of Interview: March 23, 1974)

Gold Rush Days

Morris: What about your childhood in Colusa County?

B. May: Would you like me to begin with my family in the pioneer movement?

Morris: Yes.

B. May: My grandfather, Thomas Clark Hubbard,* ran away from Middle Haddam, Connecticut, because he didn't fancy being a shipwright. He had been apprenticed, probably at twelve, to learn that trade and ran away on the first ship he worked on, the schooner Montague built on the Connecticut River at the then head of navigation for sailing vessels. She was going around the Horn to San Francisco in the spring of '49. When they got to Santiago de Chile, the crew heard the news of Marshall's discovery of gold. Their next port was San Francisco, so they had a long trip to decide how they'd get to the mines. They eventually hit upon an idea which many other crews had. They made a bargain with the captain that he would not report them as deserters if they would share whatever gold they found. On this kickback arrangement, they formed a company and my grandfather, being the youngest and the one who wrote the best hand, was the secretary.

---

*Thomas Clark Hubbard, 1830-1886, gold miner and grain rancher, native of Connecticut; came to California in 1849. Father of two. BHM

B. May: They went to the middle fork of the Yuba and diverted it, built a cofferdam, and placer-mined the bed of the river. They evidently got enough gold out of that to break up the company and satisfy the captain. It's amusing that they found mining so much harder work than they had expected that they began writing to the captain, saying that he should come up and help. Of course, he never did. He was having a fine time in San Francisco, probably. Finally, the last pathetic letter in the minute book, which my grandfather wrote invited the captain to come up not to do any hard work, but just to do the cooking.** He didn't.

Morris: Oh, that's lovely tale.

B. May: And the minute book includes whatever each day's assignment was, how much work on the dam, how much gold dust they estimated they had, and then who'd gone hunting and what he'd got, maybe one deer and two bears, to keep the camp fed.

Morris: That's interesting. In other words, they were a completely self-sufficient operation out there.

B. May: Oh, all alone. They broke up when they had, they thought, a start for each of them. My grandfather, after that, did not mine, but earned his stake in building for other miners -- cofferdams, flumes, water wheels and the like. In a rather brief period of time, a matter of a few years, he was able to go to what was later organized as Colusa County where he bought a small section of the Larkin children's rancho, which Thomas Larkin had held for his children. This was a strip of land that went from the Sacramento River to the swamp land, to the west.

Grandfather Hubbard: Goldmining and Grain

Stephens:* I'm interested in what you were told about your grandfather starting the ranch in Colusa County because to me this is part of the interesting story of California. Agriculture is the most significant thing about California's development then. He was unusually successful, apparently, and must have acquired a lot of money to --

---

*During this Saturday afternoon session, Jane Stephens, Mrs. May's niece, sat in on the interview and encouraged her aunt to talk about their pioneer forebears.

**The minute book is presently in the possession of Mrs. May's brother.

B. May: My grandfather did acquire assets while he was at the mines, enough money for a substantial investment in land. It's interesting that this is what he finally decided. We don't know whether he considered San Francisco or the other mines which developed soon after, 1849, in Nevada and elsewhere. It probably was because an older man, John Boggs,* who was a state senator and then a United States Senator and active in the establishment of California as a state, befriended him and said, "I've got a chance to buy the Larkin children's rancho." It was many acres, because this little, small ranch that my grandfather bought was about 3,000 acres.

Morris: You said that was the smallest portion of the Larkin rancho?

B. May: That was the small portion that he was able to buy because he and John Boggs were doing it as one transaction. The Larkins sold it as one piece and Boggs sold grandfather a half-mile strip, which ran from the river, about twelve miles north of Colusa, west to swamps then called the goose lands, which were converted in World War I to the cultivation of rice. This strip was about 3,000 acres. So, he must have done fairly well.

Morris: That must have been a huge amount of land to somebody from Connecticut.

B. May: Yes, indeed. My father William Henry Hubbard** was born on the Larkin children's ranch; by this time they were calling it the Hubbard ranch.

Dad was born in 1865 and I was born in 1897, also on the Larkin children's rancho, at a point in the map twelve miles north of Colusa and four miles south of Princeton. You can see that there was a time gap between my father's father, who ran away from Middle Haddam, and his grandchildren. He had died many years before I was born. So, unfortunately, I know little detail about his career, but I'm proud that he did come West at such an early age.

---

*Boggs served in the state senate in the sessions of 1871, 1873, 1887, 1889, and 1899.

**William Henry Hubbard, 1865-1946. Rancher, orchardist, investor, amateur pianist. Husband of Virginia Milton Hubbard -- native of Colusa County -- Republican. BHM

B. May: Having introduced my father and announced my birth, it seems only fair to present my mother briefly now. Her influence and my memories of her will appear in this record again and again -- Virginia Milton Hubbard (Jennie Brooks if you knew her in Colusa), who married my father and lived on the Larkin children's rancho in the 1880s.*

My grandmother, Sarah Jane Beeny Hubbard, was brought by her father, George Beeny, as a child in 1851 or 1852.** The Beeny family came from New Jersey by ship to Panama and across the isthmus by mule train, riding mules. This was the journey which most impressed my grandmother because she always remembered the wonderful foligage and the rain, the exotic plants, and brilliant birds. Then she would shake her head and say, "Don't talk about covered wagons to me!"

Morris: That's what I was thinking. That would have been practically as hard a journey as the covered wagons.

B. May: It wasn't, because they had two ship voyages, which weren't too comfortable, but still they weren't walking for months across the plains. They waited at the Pacific end of the mule journey until a ship came by and picked them up.

Throughout her long life grandmother Hubbard took deep pride in remembering that none of her family was pushed West by failure or poverty, to walk to California. She didn't tell her grandchildren (or perhaps we didn't listen) why the Hubbards and the

---

*Virginia Milton Hubbard, 1866-1951. Rancher's wife and assistant ranch manager. Mother of three -- native of New York; brought to California in 1866 or '67 by her mother Catharine Milton Brooks. Married William Henry Hubbard. Episcopalian. Republican. BHM

**George Beeny, 1815-1892. Inn-keeper in Brown's Valley; rancher there and elsewhere in Northern California. Father of Sarah Jane Hubbard and grandfather of Wm. H. Hubbard. Came to California from New Jersey in 1851 or '52. BHM

Sarah Jane Beeny Hubbard, 1845-1929. Colusa rancher's wife. As widow, lived in Oakland and Los Angeles. Active trader in city lots. Prohibitionist and Republican. Native of New Jersey. Came to California in early 1850s. Mother of two, William Henry Hubbard and May Beeny Hubbard Fortin. BHM

RESIDENCE OF T.C.HUBBARD, PRINCETON, COLUSA CO. CAL.

B. May: Beenys came. But we couldn't overlook her satisfaction in knowing they all either paid or worked their way on ships. "I never saw a buffalo chip," she said complacently and frequently.

They went to San Francisco and, again, we weren't told what decided her father, instead of going to the mines himself, to make his living by providing services for miners. In Brown's Valley, one of the routes from Marysville to the northern mines, he established an overnight way station for the truckers of mine supplies to spend the night, stable their horses, and park their wagons. He ran this inn successfully and comfortably. He, too, was dead long before I was around to hear the tales of Brown's Valley, still beautiful.

Morris: Yes, it's beautiful country.

B. May: I suppose it was about three days out of Sacramento; their hauls may have been shorter in some cases because the riverboats in those days could go up as far as Colusa and Marysville on the river.

Morris: Did your grandparents marry before the land was bought?

B. May: I suspect not, but think that he came down from the hills, bought the land, and then began making friends. They were married at the time the house was built.

Morris: Did your grandmother talk much about those early days?

B. May: She talked often about establishing the home ranch. It was in rough, open country, and a struggle to get crops and garden planted and growing. They built a house, a white house with a veranda downstairs and an open porch above it, with white clapboards and a green roof, very like the houses grandfather remembered from Connecticut. The house was fenced on an acre of ground and my grandmother talked frequently of the hard work to start trees and the help she had from Indian women to carry the water for the young trees that they planted.

Later plantings were put around it because my grandmother used to tell about more watering. Indian women came to do laundry and other housework, and they too would carry water and water the trees.

Morris: In the drawing that the artist made for the county history, the trees are planted in very tidy, straight lines. Was that because they were fruit trees?

B. May: Yes. The white picket fence was lined with black locusts, flowering locust trees, and then within the square house yard there was a mixed, family orchard. Around the house itself, there were hardy flowers, lilacs and other shrubs, and Harrison's Gold -- the almost indestructible single yellow rose, which, unlike my family, came West by covered wagon and still blooms each spring in the mines.

Morris: Did your grandmother ever tell you about why your grandfather decided to stay in California instead of going back East or continuing -- ?

B. May: No. It doesn't seem to have occurred to my grandparents to go back East. They came and they stayed.

Morris: Settled right down, yes.

B. May When my grandfather and grandmother Hubbard had been married for some years, the transcontinental railroad had been built. So, they went to Middle Haddam without notifying his family, a pleasant surprise they thought, with two small children and a large hamper of fried chicken to eat on the way, and without any thought of staying East. Grandfather carried most of his money in gold dust or nuggets -- to show off a bit in Connecticut.

Indians in Colusa County

Morris: Were there many Indians still living in the area?

B. May: Yes, but except for her appreciation of their help in house or garden, my grandmother had no stories to tell of them. They came for a day and went back to the rancheria at night. My own memories of Indians center around our one room school. Here is my recollection of my father's Indian memories as told to his children -- perhaps more hunting than Indians.

Even when my father, in the '60s and '70s, was a boy, there were many Indians in Colusa County. They were called Colusa Indians; at least by the whites. They hunted a great deal over our ranch, in fact, over everybody's ranch. Most of this hunting was in the swampy areas. My father, since he was interested in hunting all of his life, often described their methods, which were adapted to the great quantity of game.

B. May: Indians had large nets weighted with stones to throw over and net the feeding birds instead of shooting them. There were great flocks of wild fowl, for Sacramento Valley was and is one of the great flyways. There is now, west and a little north of the ranch, a large game refuge. Wild swan, common when my father was a boy and then nearly eradicated, are back in the refuge now. At dusk when the geese are coming in but the ducks are going out, the air seems solid with wings.

With their nets, the Indians got very good bags. Of course, there were also market hunters who came up during the flights, who shot and then took the ducks and geese and swans back to San Francisco. One of the encouraging changes with today's concern for birds and vanishing species is that the men who shoot for sport nowadays have put up the money for refuges, not only in the United States but in Canada, so that the birds are protected and the swans are included.

Morris: That's marvelous. One doesn't think of swans as a wild bird any more.

B. May: But there they are with their beautiful wild call. Again, the valley is part of one of the great bird migration routes of North America, swans and all.

Another one of Dad's stories was how frightened he was once as a boy; he was out alone shooting from a small boat and came around a bend masked with weeds into a flock of swans that he didn't know was there. They "got up," as you say, the way the wind was blowing, in his direction and knocked him out of the boat. He was frightened for a minute or two that he was not going to be able to get out of the water and muck, but did. But he said, "Imagine having so many birds!" Of course, a swan is a big, heavy bird, so it took not too many of them to knock a boy in his teens out of his boat.

Stephens: I didn't know that they were ever game bird for eating. But you say they took them to the city in the early days?

B. May: Yes. City folks and Indians ate them. Dad said they didn't eat them on the ranch because they didn't care for them. Swans are rather fat, a fatty, strong bird. If you had your choice and you lived in that country, you didn't eat geese either because there were lots of duck and quail, so that you chose to eat the game birds that were tender and flavorful. There's an old hunter's proverb, you know, that says, "If the bird flies, eat the legs; if it walks, eat the breast."

Morris: Yes, that makes good sense.

Brooks Grandparents: the Merchant and the Milliner

B. May: Since we're concerned with employment for women, let's talk about my mother's trip West.

Morris: How did she come?

B. May: Not with the pioneers. Her stepfather George G. Brooks brought her to live in Colusa in the late 1860s. But first here's her mother's story of looking for support for herself and her child; Catharine Beatty Milton, Kate. She had been married happily in New York to a man who was a construction worker and killed in an accident when their first child, my mother, was "a babe in arms," five or six months old.

Morris: Oh, dear!

B. May: Well, what to do. There was no insurance or pension or compensation. She had a slightly older sister who was not married and both of them knew plain sewing. The older girl, Myra Beatty, had a little experience in making hats.

They had heard that in California times were much better than in New York and that there were many more men, so the two of them put their money together, took the baby, and got on the boat for Panama. By that time there was a little railway across the isthmus to take them to the boat for San Francisco. On the way, they met my grandfather, George G. Brooks, from Colusa whom Kate Milton later married, with baby and all!

Morris: Isn't that marvelous! He was on his way around?

B. May: He was on his way back home after having been in New York, so he must have been fairly well established as a merchant. At least he could do himself well as a bachelor. He played the piano and sang. But Kate was cautious; she wasn't going to take the very first opportunity. So, the sisters went to San Francisco as they planned. They put my mother in a foster home; I don't know how they found it.

Morris: There were foster homes then?

B. May: This was a woman who took care of babies and the sisters liked her, as did my mother, who used to go and see her later when she was in San Francisco. The home was out in the Mission, near Woodward's Gardens. Transportation was so poor that the two sisters lived downtown, got themselves jobs, and after what people call a "decent interval" --

Morris: That's the word I was thinking of, yes.

B. May: Kate married her suitor from Colusa and they lived very happily ever after.

Morris: That's a charming story.

B. May: The other sister, whose name was Myra, decided that maybe she'd see more of California, so she went up to Eureka and opened a millinery store there and married, also happily and successfully, and lived in Eureka.

People traveled back and forth then, it seems to me, almost more than we do. Aunt Myra used to come to Colusa and see us all and correct our hair bows.

Morris: Was she a hat fancier?

B. May: Yes. Oh, all women wore hats then and in my mother's time.

Someplace in the family pictures, there's a wonderful picture of my family all going on the little zigzag train up Mt. Tamalpais. We children had been allowed to take our hats off, but my mother and all the aunts and older cousins are all done up in sailors and chip-straws and feathers, looking out on the mountain scenes.

Morris: Had those two girls come out from Ireland together without their parents?

B. May: No, they'd been born in New York. My grandmother never expressed any wish to go to Ireland or had any Irish correspondents. Admiral Beatty from the First World War was the only Irishman that I ever remember hearing her mention, except a nephew who lived in Brooklyn. When I was in college, he seemed to be the only relative of her own with whom she was in touch, and he a policeman.

Morris: Of course!

B. May: She wanted once to send him a particularly nice gift at Christmas. In Chinatown she saw a beautiful embroidered Chinese jacket. The men in her family favored smoking jackets. So she thought nothing would be nicer than this handsome, bright, Chinese blue, gaily embroidered jacket.

Morris: With gold dragons and all of those things?

B. May: She sent it on to Brooklyn and got eventually a letter of thanks which said, "Dear Aunt Kate, Thank you so much. But I must tell you, I gave it away to a girl. You know, it wasn't the thing for a plain policeman." [Laughter] For years, the family watchword, if someone was a little fancy, we'd say, "Well, it wouldn't do for a plain policeman." Well, how's that for a nosegay?

Morris: Oh, that's lovely.

(Date of Interview: March 30, 1974)

Morris: We were talking about your family in Colusa County. Was Colusa a very rural area when George Brooks took his new family there?

B. May: It was a rural area, but those Valley towns were better market towns than they are now. I mean "market" in the old sense of having for sale a wide variety of goods, of clothing, all sorts of things, as well as food supplies, to which they tend to be limited nowadays.

The memory of my grandfather's store continues to amaze me. He only sold things he was interested in himself in his brick building on a corner in Colusa. He sold jewelry and kept a watchmaker. He sold guns, either shooting irons or hunting guns, and he sold books.

Morris: What a fascinating combination.

B. May: And this was all. He raised thirteen children and sent all of them who wanted to go and could manage to get in -- well, he sent them to Stanford. You couldn't possibly do that today from a rural store.

Morris: It's interesting that there was a market for books. Jewelry is more understandable and guns certainly, since so many men were hunters.

B. May: Yes. People believed in putting their money in jewelry then. This was always going to be a resource. And the book side was large and sold well, children through adults.

Morris: Really? That's interesting.

B. May: Yes. He wasn't a wealthy man, but he was -- I suppose, in the Forsythe Saga, they would have called him a "warm man." As I say, he made a very good living for a rather extravagant wife and thirteen children.

As you can imagine, I have hordes of cousins. In Colusa, we often went to my grandmother's house for large gatherings. Her younger brothers and sisters, all during my mother's lifetime, were also often in our home. All of them are dead now and, in today's breakup of family relationships, we don't hear from their children or their children's children. None live in Colusa, I believe.

Morris: Starting with thirteen brothers and sisters, that does become a huge collection of people to keep track of in your generation and beyond.

How early had George Brooks come and started his business in Colusa?

B. May: He was well established in Colusa by 1867 but I don't know when he first came to California. He died in 1915 and my grandmother Kate two years later. Neither talked of their early days and I don't know details of their lives before they appeared as generous and kind elders among their many children and grandchildren in Colusa.

Ranching in California

Morris: You said that your grandfather died while your father was still quite young, so that, like his father, as a young man of seventeen or eighteen he was in charge of the ranch.*

---

*William Henry Hubbard, 1865-1946. Rancher, orchardist, investor, amateur pianist. Husband of Virginia Milton Hubbard -- native of Colusa County -- Republican. BHM

B. May: As long as we owned that home ranch it was used for raising grain -- wheat, barley, oats. By the time I was a ranch child, there were levees to control the river, levees that broke every now and then. Our house was on a rising ground, pioneer style back from the river. Ranchers worried about the levee breaking during the winter and during the summer about fire in the grain.

I can remember seeing long lines of fire and smoke and hearing the accounts of the men fighting it. Fortunately, we were never burned out, but many were. In those days, when security was not expected, or even valued very highly, a rancher felt quite satisfied if he had one good crop out of three.

Morris: That's remarkable.

B. May: You could make it and pull through if you got one good crop out of three. But if crop failure went on, then usually you owed so much money -- mortgages upaid, supply bills, wages -- you had to sell out. Some ranchers go broke each bad year.

Morris: Would that mean that new families would come in, or that the neighbors would buy that land to add to their own?

B. May: It varied. Of course, this was all large-scale farming. This country was not thought by the Spaniards, and or by the Americans when they came, to be adaptable to small farms. In the first place, there was no market for small specialty crops. There is irrigation there now and a greater variety of crops, but then you staked your all on grain.

One feature of river ranches was the land on the river side of the levee, which flooded each year and which my father rented. His usual tenants were Chinese broom manufacturers who grew broom corn, a quick crop, in this moist land.

Morris: You could harvest a crop after the flood waters went down and before the fall rains started?

B. May: Yes. Broom corn was before the vacuum cleaner, a profitable crop and groups of Chinese traders in brooms would come to see my father in the spring. They'd look around, evaluate the chances for the year's crop and bid on the leases. This was always a merry time for ranch children because they brought us the most charming gifts -- like little carved bone athletes. (You turned the handle; the little bone figures did tricks.) And fireworks and coconut candy and lichee nuts. We always celebrated

B. May: Chinese New Year's because if we were on the ranch for Fourth of July, we couldn't have fireworks.

Morris: It was too dry by then for fireworks. Would the Chinese merchants bring their whole families along?

B. May: No. Only men came, for a day, ate dinner with us and left, pleased or not pleased with the contract.

Morris: I see. And then the merchant who arranged a lease with your father -- did he come back himself and grow the corn and make the brooms, or send -- ?

B. May: I think he sent a Chinese crew back to plant and harvest it. I was far more interested in the lichee nuts!

Morris: If Colusa was the farthest point up the river that shipping could come in your father's time, it must have been a very prosperous center. How long did the boats continue to be the way they moved the grain?

B. May: Until the coming north of the railroad. Then it became cheaper to haul it out to the tracks to the west, and there are now, along the SP tracks, large elevators, most of them for rice, which is now a large-scale machine operation.

Morris: What did your father use for help running the ranch?

B. May: Men.

Morris: Men? It would be a lot of men and not too much machinery at that point?

B. May: Machinery came in use as it developed. At first, under my grandfather, the grain was cut by hand and thrashed on a threshing floor. But in my earliest memory, the grain was harvested by a combine pulled by mule teams. For harvest a large crew was needed -- perhaps twenty to twenty-five men.

Later, combines were run by tractors or had tractor motors in the combine itself. The combines that we had that I remember best threshed the grain as they went along. Sacks were filled by the men riding on the tailgate and pushed over to be picked up by wagons.

The oats were usually cut for hay. So during the late spring and early summer you had to recruit labor in the nearest town,

B. May: but some came drifting by, or there might be small gangs that went around together. The foreman,and usually two or three men to look after the stock,wintered on the ranch, because if you were operating on mule power, you couldn't turn the mules out to walk around in the country until the next crop.

The ranch hands had, in many ways, a hard life. They lived on every ranch in a bunkhouse, which was a large house with wooden bunks and usually a separate, big kitchen where they ate.

Morris: Did they do their own cooking?

B. May: Oh, no. They had a cook.

Morris: Your mother didn't cook for them?

B. May: No, As a matter of fact -- I hate to tell you this! -- my mother didn't cook for anybody. The ranches had Chinese cooks, because there were enough men employed to require cooks for their crews -- and a good cook was needed to keep your men content.

My mother's role was that of assistant ranch manager with responsibility for many supplies. Flour and other foods came by the barrel, inventories had to be watched -- supplies picked-up with Mother often driving a two-horse team in a wagon. When my father was away, she made the decisions. Domestically, she planned menus, ordered meats, and arranged for guests and for house cleaning. But no one expected her to cook. When we moved to Berkeley, she went to a cooking school.

A Chinese cook accepted women as the mistress of the house but not as a sharer of his kitchen. He usually called her "Missy." Our cooks called Mother "Jennie" and Dad "Will." When we had a good one, other ranchers tried to hire him away, to keep their crews happy instead.

There was a vegetable garden out beyond the corral, and that was also usually run by the Chinese cooks in my childhood. We couldn't have grown up without Tom! Chinamen were all called "Tom." Now, don't ask me why. At least in Colusa County, a Chinese cook's name, eight out of ten times, would be Tom. They came and stayed a long time on the ranches where, of course, they were isolated from their Chinese associates.

Morris: They must have been, yes.

B. May: But almost all of them went back to China. They'd save their money and go back and return during the time they were working for a family. This is why people who were born in California in those days usually had a deep affection for the Chinese and were appalled at the idea that a Chinese person who knew or had worked with a person of another race would harm him in any way.

When I was a young woman working in San Francisco in the '30s, a Chinese man who'd been a cook and houseboy for a white woman for a good many years was accused of killing her. All the evidence was against him. They couldn't get a jury to convict him. Nobody believed it. We've now learned that the Chinese are like the rest of us; they're people with a wide variety of qualities. But I can remember in this case, my friends who were attorneys saying, "The DA must go through trial motions because they have a great deal of physical evidence, but they'll never convict him."

Chinese led a very lonely life in Colusa County because they didn't fraternize with either the people who lived permanently on the ranches or the men who came through to work in the crops. In those days, the migrant worker was almost always the single man.

Morris: And there were migrant workers coming through to harvest, rather than hands who lived there?

B. May: Oh, yes. Where you're growing grain, you need a small crew for planting and then there's nothing much to be done but put out some scarecrows until a crop is grown and fit to be harvested. That is, nothing to be done unless it is a bad year for fire. But there were usually not more than two or three men who would work over the winter and after. It would be hard to get them to stay because they didn't like it usually. They were used to working and living in groups and so preferred Sacramento or Stockton.

Morris: It would have been a lonely life for them, too.

B. May: When it wasn't harvest season, they ate with the family, but they lived in a cold, rather cheerless bunkhouse. It wasn't as drear as it sounds because in many ways the facilities were pretty much those of the ranchers themselves. I mean, nobody had indoor plumbing. Most people took baths out of buckets. But my father's family had lived in Oakland and so we had a bathtub, which was a matter of great elegance. Sometimes there

B. May: wasn't enough pressure from the tank to get the water up to the second story and then when you let it out it came out of a pipe on the side of the house.

Morris: And watered the walls. [Laughter]

B. May: The bathtub was in a room that had been designed as a bedroom, so it was very large and full of extraneous bits of furniture and very sociable.

Morris: That's marvelous. Did you fill it with a pump, or did it have faucets?

B. May: No, we had faucets and hot water from the kitchen boiler. Eventually, they put a drain pipe on the outside of the house that ran waste bath water down to a sump. For cold, the kitchen had a pump from a well and this pump also served the kitchen sink. Then there was another pump hidden in a back passage between the kitchen and the milk room.

The ranch crews did have, in many ways, a hard life. They lived, except for housing, at the same every day standard as their employer. The rancher worked with his men, who knew he might be broke if the crop failed and join them in job hunting. Still it was a hard, dull life, so they played cards and drank a good deal. If a man didn't come back from town, then the rancher had to hitch up and see what had become of him on Sunday night. There were no other nearby amusements, except what you provided for yourself.

Sometimes the men provided remarkable ones. One year, we had a pretty colt which the men taught to walk up the steps into the bunkhouse and look out of the window. Anyone coming in through the corral would be astounded to see it. A stable with steps? My mother was distressed because she didn't think the colt could be housebroken. But my father said, "Well, it's their house, Jenny, It's their house."

Morris: Were these mostly younger men?

B. May: Yes. They were either young men seeking their fortune, or old, broken-down men.

Perhaps this is a good place to say that I do not agree with simplistic souls who oppose labor-saving equipment for farms. No one who has seen stoop labor picking prunes off the ground or

B. May: using short hoes would want it to go on. The Taft-Hartley provisions for free and secret elections and other protections have strengthened industrial unions -- T-H isn't perfect but look at the contrast between the position of city and farm labor today, when we call "ranching" "agribusiness."

Morris: Did any of the men from the Indian rancheria come in and work at all on the harvest?

B. May: Only for day work.

Morris: In other words, they wouldn't move into the bunkhouse?

B. May: No, this was their choice.

Morris: Were there any Indians who ranched at all?

B. May: I doubt it very much, because I don't think the Indians were treated any better in Colusa County than elsewhere. I doubt if they had the resources, particularly during that period when to make it at all, ranching had to be on a large scale. I have a vague memory of Indians raising and breaking horses.

Morris: Their own or for other people?

B. May: For other people. Trading in horses. The rancheria, though it was good sized, could not furnish enough occupation for all the people that lived there. They had small vegetable gardens for their own use with not enough land or market to give them a cash crop.

Morris: Was the land theirs by treaty, or general acceptance, or had they bought it?

B. May: I think it had been by treaty.

Morris: Did you ever go and visit it?

B. May: Yes, often, maybe to buy a melon or two. There was no real fraternizing, at school and other meeting places, but there was no hostility either. It was: "You leave me alone and I'll leave you alone." They did not attend the Christian churches and there was not much effort to interest them, because churches were a long ways off.

Marketing the Crops

Morris: Did your father make his own arrangements for shipping and marketing his crops?

B. May: Yes, whatever he sold. He had two other ranches, one of which my family still owns. One was the hill ranch on the eastern slope of the Coast Range and that was homesteaded.

Morris: By him?

B. May: By father and his uncles, Hubbards and Beenys. For some reason or other, none of them stayed permanently except one uncle, James Henry Beeny, who roamed around a bit, but came and ran the hill ranch every now and then. That is just under 2,000 acres and it's not far from Snow Mountain, which is the highest peak in that part of the Coast Range, and sometimes snow-covered. When you were annoyed beyond bearing, you'd say, "Oh, I wish I were on the top of Snow Mountain!"

There is some hope that Snow Mountain will now be named a wilderness area because it has never been farmed and the timber's not been cut off, pines, oak, manzanita, buckeye, and madrone.

The third ranch was on the river side of the levee, an orchard of prunes and apricots and some peaches, to be dried. Dried fruit was sold to be shipped to Europe. Mr. Rosenberg, who established the Rosenberg Foundation, was a dried fruit dealer on a large scale, with an enviable reputation because his word was good. If Rosenberg said he'd pay you so much and the price fell, he still paid what he had originally bid. Until refrigeration, dried fruit was important to northern Europe. Fruit to dry was a worrisome crop because just as you began drying on open trays in the sun, early rains might or might not come to spoil a year's effort.

1906 Earthquake

B. May: One of the things I'm not sure I remember, but I've been told it many times as proof positive that the 1906 earthquake was felt for miles was that everybody's cream spilled over from the milk pans in 1906. We had a cool milk room on the north side of the house, with wide shelves all around it and flat, tin milk pans,

B. May: which were shallow so the cream rose. All the milk and cream had slopped over.

I feel much more positive that I actually saw the glow in the sky from San Francisco burning -- about a hundred and fifty miles away.

Morris: Good heavens!

B. May: Many of the men had gone to the city when the word came by the stage driver. Of course, everybody knew something terrible had happened because the earthquake had been felt although it did no severe damage.

Morris: And the cream spilled.

B. May: So, people who had families or concerns in the Bay Area did what my father did, just got on a horse and started out.

He rode until he got to faster transportation. He probably rode to Davis to the railroad there. I don't know how he got to Oakland, but he did. Then, of course, we didn't know what had happened to him. Fortunately, he found that his mother and sister were safe. They lived in a little house on 20th Street in Oakland, just a block west of Capwell's now, a block west of Telegraph. When they had moved there, my aunt, my father's sister, had wept bitterly because no one would come to see them so far away from --

Morris: From Colusa?

B. May: From the center of town, from the center of Oakland. They had been living down at Seventh or Eighth Street and here they were way out at 20th.

That section of the Bay Area didn't burn, as you know. But the chimney of the house had fallen and wrecked the bedroom end of the house. In fact, my grandmother always said that it just showed you ought to get out of bed at once, because she woke up and leaped up and then in a few minutes the chimney had come down.

Morris: Had fallen through the roof!

B. May: By this time, she was either under a table or anyhow, out of the bed!

B. May: Then we began getting boxes from the East. My own ranch family had few relatives who were in touch with them, but my mother's stepfather, who was a merchant in the town of Colusa, still had a large and charitable family in New York and they began boxing up things. Having little notion of distances in California, they sent them all to George G. Brooks in Colusa. And the most remarkable things came out of those boxes.

Morris: This was to help the refugees of the earthquake?

B. May: To help the refugees, yes. Like satin shoes and tweed skirts and high-heeled shoes -- all kinds of things! It was a great amusement for my young aunts and every now and in later years, you'd run across an exotic piece of material in grandmother's house, and she'd say, "Oh, yes! That was in the box from the Brooks's in New York. We didn't see what they could do with it in San Francisco." There were sensible things, too, underwear and men's shirts and everyday dresses.

Morris: How long would it have taken those to arrive?

B. May: This I don't remember. A long time. So, I think the immediate nudity had been pretty well covered in San Francisco!

A Child's Activities

B. May: To add to the difficulties of ranching and raising children, Colusa County was malaria country. As soon as the warm weather came, if possible, women and children left for the city.

Morris: I see. Which city? Or is that a redundant question?

B. May: How can you ask? And you, a Californian! Or at least an adopted one.

Morris: I know that's true in the Bay Area.

B. May: Oh, it was true all over Northern California. "Where's So-and-So been?" "Oh, he's been down to the city for a few days."*

Morris: Would you rent a house?

B. May: Yes. My grandmother Brooks, who lived in Colusa, had thirteen

---

*'The city,' of course, means San Francisco!

B. May: children and a great many grandchildren. She would rent a big San Francisco house, and her relatives would take turns visiting her. For remaining, we went to Capitola or Santa Cruz because the vacation sea air was supposed to be just the thing.

Morris: Very healthful, yes.

B. May: By the time I was old enough to remember these jaunts to the city, we went by train. We drove ten or fifteen miles to a little station called Norman and took the train to Davis, to change to an overland train. Davis was famous among Valley children because you got ice cream there in the little cardboard cartons with the little tin spoons, which you saved for the dolls.

The great technological advance of my childhood was the ice cream cornucopia, because one summer -- no one had warned us -- the ice cream came in a cake. I can remember all sorts of inventions, but the one that surprised me most, I think, was --

Morris: Ice cream coming in a new shape!

B. May: On we went to cross the Bay on the ferry that took train and all. All the trains were slow and they were all hot. Long before we got to Benicia and the ferry, the grown-ups were saying, "Oh, don't you hope the fog is in?" Then, when we got to Benicia, we would race up to the deck.

Morris: So, the train ferries went from Benicia?

B. May: Benicia to Martinez. Then the tracks went along by the Bay. I remember thinking it was queer that after having expressed such longing for fog, my mother usually went downstairs on the ferry and had a cup of coffee. That's just the way the grown-ups behaved.

At the Oakland Mole, we got another ferry to the city and took -- I'm not sure about my dates. I don't know whether I overlapped horsecars, or I have only heard them described. But there'd be some kind of a streetcar and we would ride to wherever the summer house was. The house that I remember best was one on the top of Fillmore Street hill, which overlooked the site of the 1915 Fair and today's marina.

In Colusa County, the feature of life I perhaps remember best was the school, the Packard District School, a one-room school, one teacher, and about twenty or maybe twenty-five

B. May: students. You recited with anybody you could work with.

We were not segregated by age, but by ability to handle material of a restricted curriculum. About a third of the students were Indians. The thing that interests me now is that we didn't think there was anything exotic about the Indians. The thing that most impressed me about the Indians was they were all so big.

I knew how to read before I went to school. My father had taught me at home to read, so that I, as a reader, was always reciting with huge Indian boys, because Indians usually didn't go to school until they were fairly old. They rode ponies. I was not allowed to ride. With no near neighbors my parents were concerned about riding alone and also because there were "hobos," -- men who wandered up and down the roads looking for work or a hand-out. You see, we were always going through hard times.

Morris: Yes. Much more visibly and in a much shorter cycle.

B. May: Maybe my parents were overly cautious, but they also thought that horses were smarter than little girls and might dump me off before we got there. Best days my mother drove me to school in a buggy behind Mike, the carriage horse.

Morris: Your brother was older or younger?

B. May: My brother is younger and never went to the Packard District School. We'd come to Berkeley before he was old enough.

I remember enjoying school, despite the limited curriculum, and the trouble getting there. We didn't study aesthetics or nature, art or drawing or crafts. We worked hard at arithmetic and reading and history and reciting. Every Friday afternoon, we recited.

Morris: I know this was the custom. I've always wondered what it was that you recited.

B. May: Oh, "The Boy Stood on the Burning Deck."

Morris: Oh, rhetoric, epic poetry.

B. May: Poems -- "Shoot If You Must This Old Gray Head." Let's see -- what else? Lots of Longfellow "Hiawatha" in part, "The Wreck of the Hesperus," and more New England -- James Lowell's

B. May: "Snowbound," "What is so Rare." Bits of Shakespeare - "I Come to Bury," "St. Cyprian's Day," and so on.

Morris: Yes. What about spelling bees?

B. May: We had spelling lessons, but no competition like spelling bees. I suspect the teacher was so worn out by the end of the day that she didn't want any judging.

Morris: Would you have started at age six?

B. May: I started at age seven, so that I was with older children at once because of my reading skill.

Morris: Were there any Indian girls about your own age while you were going through this school that you -- ?

B. May: No. They were older too. I remember fewer girls. There were, on the whole, fewer girls in the school. But this may be just an early frivilous notion!

Morris: Could we go back a minute? Do you remember your father teaching you to read? I think that's an important story.

B. May: I don't remember how my father taught me. But I know why. He played the piano well for a man of his age and time and after a day's riding or supervision of whatnot, he wished to play the piano before dinner. But my mother had been struggling with house affairs and children all day and she thought that children should have time with their father. Perhaps Ladies' Home Journal had been putting forth a theory, but there was the idea that fathers should participate in child rearing.

My father believed if you could do something instead of arguing the point, it would work better. So, he taught us to read. I don't remember when I couldn't read. We read sitting under the big, old, square piano, my sister and I. I can remember reading St. Nicholas and fascinating books for children, no "See Dick Run," but Sarah Crewe and Editha's Burglar or one of the long poems about Dick Whittington.

Morris: I remember St. Nicholas. What other things were there?

B. May: Oh, Youth's Companion; lots of books, not all of them children's books.

Morris: Did you have Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare, by any chance?

B. May: Yes and Hawthorne's version of Greek myths. I remember sitting under the piano and when I got stuck, I'd tug Dad's trousers. Then I'd see his blond head upside down, and I'd hold up the book. He'd tell me the word and then go on playing.

Morris: That must have developed quite a power of concentration.

B. May: He played the piano and practiced a great deal. I sound as if he were walking the levees and fighting fires all the time, but my mother and father led a light-hearted life when they could. There was a great deal of ranch visiting. Friends would drive out from Colusa to stay two or three days and put on performances.

Morris: For each other? In the parlor?

B. May: Usually there was little audience except children because nobody wanted to be out of the singing or charades. I remember "FloraDora" as a great favorite. They cakewalked and danced the can-can and sang romantic ballads. They would rehearse afternoons and photograph each other in costume, with plate cameras.

Morris: It sounds delightful.

B. May: This was a feature of autumn and spring, when the weather was nice, though sometimes in the cold late autumn people came for shooting as well as fun and games in the evening.

III BERKELEY: SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY YEARS

Moving from the Ranch

Morris: Did your father pursue the marketing end of things when he came to Berkeley?

B. May: Yes. He kept two ranches for years until he became increasingly deaf. So, after I had been graduated from the university, he and my mother went to the Santa Clara Valley and bought ten acres of apricots for occupation and income.

Morris: How did your father decide to move to Berkeley?

B. May: For two reasons, I think: one, that there was a land boom which he didn't believe would last, and a high offer for the home ranch. Two, he had been planning to move because he wasn't satisfied with having all his children go to a country school. My older sister had been sent to Los Angeles to go to high school where my Grandmother Hubbard was then living. That, my parents thought unsatisfactory. Since they had two more children on their hands about whose schooling they were concerned, they moved to Berkeley.

My husband always said that I must be a great trouble to the census takers because I was the only person he knew who in 1950 lived in the elementary school district where she graduated in 1910. He said Americans didn't do that.

Morris: That's lovely.

B. May: We lived on Piedmont Avenue and I went to Emerson School and my brother to John Muir.

Morris: With all the ranching and the entertainments, did your father become involved at all in civic affairs?

B. May: No, except opposition to a freeway down Tunnel Road and Ashby.

Morris: That's had a long history.

B. May: During Berkeley campaigns when I spoke against any freeway cutting any part of Berkeley, and was asked, "Well, how do you expect to stop it?" I would tell them that my father had been lying down in front of it for years and years and so why not stop it?

Morris: I didn't realize it had been going --

B. May: Oh, the Highway Commission's been trying to snatch that out from under us --

Morris: Since there was a Highway Commission?

B. May: In Colusa County I usually did two school grades a year. In Berkeley, mother thought, having come from a one-room school that I'd best go back. But Mr. Mosher the principal at Emerson School said, "I don't see why she shouldn't. She's got the certificates for having completed the curriculum and children from small schools usually do well. Why not let her try it?" So, I did. It was scary.

Morris: I would think so. It would be coming into a graded situation, wouldn't it, if there was a sixth grade and a seventh grade and an eighth grade?

B. May: Yes. And so many children!

Morris: How many to a class?

B. May: I think even then there were thirty-five or forty in our class. But I survived. I remember poignantly the first day when my mother went away and left me in the schoolyard. The principal had told me that the bell would ring and all the children would march in. It wasn't clear to me where we were going or how I would identify where I was to march. A kindly little girl spoke to me and said, "I'm Adelaide," and helped me. She was an Army child and so she'd changed schools many times.

Morris: Every two years.

B. May: I never saw her after grammar school, but I've never forgotten her.

Morris: Now, how had your other grandmother gotten to Los Angeles?

B. May: She moved there to live. In Los Angeles on vacation, she fell in love with it because Los Angeles was then a lovely spot, with its flowers, and the scent of the orange blossoms downtown when the wind was right.

Morris: I can believe it.

B. May: From the top of Angel's Flight, you saw Baldy and all the mountains the other side of Riverside. My grandmother decided she'd like to live there after the earthquake, in which her own cottage on 20th Street in Oakland had been badly damaged.

Morris: She sounds like she was quite a resourceful and independent lady.

B. May: Yes, she was independent, widowed when young. Her daughter (Aunt May) had been married and divorced, which seemed a great disgrace then. The two of them lived together and with one of our family characters -- there were more characters in those days -- our Aunt Jenny Beeny, who'd married one of the young uncles who homesteaded the hill ranch. Riding one day his horse hit a gopher hole, threw him, fell on him and killed him.

Just like a New England poet, Aunt Jenny retired from the world. So grandmother took her to Los Angeles to live in a big, white house on Burlington Avenue, which is now a dreary slum, and I don't go to see it any more.

Morris: That's painful.

B. May: But then it was a very cheerful street. Among the people who lived on it were the De Valle's, Lucretia De Valle who later was Berkeley's Mrs. Henry Grady, and the Dohenys, who struck it rich in oil and were involved in the Tea Pot Dome Scandal.

I can see why grandmother enjoyed living there. She speculated in real estate and kept it from her son, who was not much of a speculator. But it was only as I grew up that I wondered about our recluse.

Morris: Did she take care of the house or do the cooking?

B. May: No. She gardened and one of the tasks for child visitors was to pick sweetpeas and pansies. Before we could go anywhere, we picked the day's crop of flowers. Aunt Jenny lived to be an old, old woman, still a recluse, still a mystery.

Distinguished Friends and Visitors

Morris: So, you would have been in the class of --

B. May: I graduated from Berkeley High School in the spring of 1914, just before the beginning of World War I. But before Berkeley High, I went to McKinley, which was the first junior high school in Berkeley and ours the first class.

It was a fun year, partly because of friends made there. The Wilder family had just got back from being missionaries or whatnot in China, so Amos and Charlotte and Thornton Wilder all went --

Morris: Thorton Wilder the playwright?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: I didn't know he was a Berkeley boy.

B. May: Thorton Wilder the novelist. I assume he doesn't think of himself as a Berkeley boy because the Wilder children were in Berkeley for only one year.

Morris: On home leave?

B. May: Yes. But they were such individuals that I remember them. Amos was the most popular because he danced divinely, we thought. He was more articulate than Thornton, who was perhaps young (or bored after China) to be with the age group at McKinley. I remember that it was fun to talk to him, but that he was not the social success that his brother was.

At McKinley, Berkeley's leading poet read to us, often at outdoor assemblies. Charles Keeler* wore his hair long and wrote not distinguished but rhythmical verse. He was also the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce.

Morris: What a marvelous combination.

---

*Keeler's plans and poetry are mentioned in more detail in George A. Pettitt's Berkeley -- the Town and Gown of It.

B. May: He developed a far-seeing plan for Berkeley, which wasn't carried out. He urged the city to buy, for park land, the banks of the five major creeks -- Codornices, Harwood, Strawberry; I can't name all five now -- from the hills to the Bay. The waterways were to run free with bridges at the principal streets, the banks planted and, where space was available, tennis and recreational space, so that every area of Berkeley --

Morris: Would have an open waterway.

B. May: And outdoor space. One friend of my father's said, "Damn it! If Charlie wasn't a poet, they'd do it!" Keeler was a charmer! I can see that long hair blowing in the wind, and no criticism of the long hair. He was the father of Leonard Keeler, who invented the first and still-not-perfected lie detector and became a well-known criminologist. Unfortunately he died early in life.

Morris: Would he have worked with August Vollmer?

B. May: No, I don't think he did -- except perhaps as a boy, because all the boys hung around August Vollmer. Leonard went to the University of Chicago and worked there. The lie detector depends on slight changes in body temperature and circulation and so on. It's never been perfected to the point that you get guaranteed, reliable results. It depends a great deal on the temperment and imagination of the person tested.

Morris: So, was Leonard a classmate of yours?

B. May: No. He was a slightly older contemporary of my brother's. They belonged to the same Boy Scout troop, one that had a pet cobra, and lost it in the hills!

Morris: That's a story I've never heard.

B. May: They searched and searched and finally found it. Both snake and scouts were glad.

Charles Keeler was also a good man with pageants. I remember taking part in the funeral he arranged for William Keith.

Morris: Mr. Keith was a friend of Mr. Keeler's?

B. May: Yes, Keith, the painter who did so many dark, handsome landscapes, in which interest revived two or three years ago. Many of his

B. May: paintings have turned up at the university gallery at St. Mary's. He was a Swedenborgian and believed that children were purer than anybody, and that young girls were carriers of good thoughts and so on.

He asked to be carried after death from his home on the southern edge of the campus to St. Mark's Church, preceded by a bevy of girls dressed in white, carrying white lilies. This was just the kind of thing Charles Keeler could and did stage manage, only he got us all there too early and left us in the garden. I don't remember what happened that we thought funny, but when he re-appeared, we were in gales of giggles. I never forgot the stricken look of the artist as he thought, "What am I going to do with these gigglers?" But we shaped up.

Morris: McKinley was only a block off Telegraph Avenue. Was that a shopping district at that time?

B. May: No. The shopping was between Bancroft and Sather Gate, then the campus entrance. Near McKinley there was a little cluster of shops for snacks.

I remember at some point in my school life, and it may have been at McKinley, that President Taft came to Berkeley, and we sang to him, which he didn't seem to enjoy greatly. No doubt he was campaigning.

Morris: Oh, dear! It sounds as if McKinley may have made more of an impression on you than Berkeley High.

Berkeley High School

B. May: No. Berkeley High made a much deeper impression as far as instruction was concerned. Berkeley High had at that time, and I hope it has continued, a very strong group of teachers. There were two notable English teachers, we thought, who kept us writing themes and correcting them. One was Miss Henley and the other Miss Christie.

Morris: My husband had English from Miss Christie in the late '30s.

B. May: I'm sure she lasted a long time. Then there was a famous Latin teacher. Berkeley High School was then so crowded that some of us had to share seats and Latin had a wave of popularity and few

B. May: desks. My father particularly wanted me to have both Greek and Latin and thought I'd better begin.

Berkeley High School didn't teach Greek, so Latin it was. I was a skinny girl, so with another skinny girl, crowded into one desk. Pop Smith taught us Latin and I still retain a word or two. He was an excellent teacher in creating the feeling of Roman culture and Romans. We built Caesar's bridge out of building blocks for example. If we behaved well for a week or two, he would tell our fortunes out of Virgil. And I can see him yet, stabbing a line and coming up with some awful, but unlikely phrase.

Morris: That's marvelous.

B. May: He used great imagination in weaving verses from Virgil into predictions for each of us.

Another notable teacher was William John Cooper, who later became U.S. Commissioner of Education. In those days, you got as a Berkeley High senior, an excellent course on "American Government and Social Problems." I was chosen to be one of the year's graduation speakers and I still resent the program. I had written a term paper for Mr. Cooper on old age pensions.

Morris: Had you now?

B. May: Yes! And I simply could not see why my father laughed so hard when I told him I had suggested old age pensions as my topic to the commencement committee. I thought pensions a very important subject and one that I would be glad to speak about to the people of Berkeley. And I <u>still</u> don't know why they wouldn't let me do it!

Morris: They didn't let you give your speech based on your paper?

B. May: No.

Morris: Oh, that does seem hard.

B. May: It seemed hard then, in part, because I, of course, was loathe to swat up another topic.

Morris: So, what did you speak about?

B. May: I said, "Well, if I can't speak about what I want to, you pick it," and the committee picked the rise of the pageant in American

B. May: life. It wasn't hard, but I thought it very dull.

Morris: Yes. Looking backwards, I would say that that was remarkably forward-looking of you to be writing about pensions as a high school student.

B. May: This was typical of Cooper's classes.

I worked on the school paper, whatever the name of it was.

Morris: Was it the Jacket? It is now.

B. May: Of course, it was the Jacket. I had my first and last defeat in an election when I lost in running for the student council.

I had a happy time at Berkeley High, centered on academic interests and hopeful of achievement.

Mountain Expeditions

B. May: Before World War I, I remember as the time that in the Elmwood neighborhood, we began going to the mountains. As a ranch child, the only place that seemed interesting to my family for vacations was the shore. But now, when that fog which we so admired was in such great supply, we joined other families for mountains and fishing. For a mountain trip, it was a good idea to have one or two other cars along in case yours broke down.

To the mountains was a long, fun trip. You took lots of supplies for picnicking on the way, strapped on the running boards, so that whoever was in the back seat had to climb out over the car side.

The first day was a good day's run to get to Sacramento. You had to ferry the river and usually there was someone who didn't start in time. So, we caught the second ferry and drove to Sacramento, where we always went to an old, pioneer cafe called the Saddle Rock. This was very educational for the young. It had a wonderful, old-time bar, at which we could see our papas drinking. The bar had a channel with water running down it, right at the level of the bar. So, it was fine for spittin' or --

Morris: Washing your glasses or your --

B. May: Or disposing of cigar ashes!

The next day, up early and we would make it to Placerville or Kyburz on the American River. By this time, everyone was exhausted, so we'd fish for a few days.

Morris: And, besides, the mountains start getting very steep just around Kyburz.

B. May: Yes. Of course, the objective was Tahoe, but nobody seemed to care when they got there. Between Kyburz and the next stop, which was just below the Donner Summit, there came a terrible hill and great strategy was required by the driver to get up it. We picnicked at the top, having survived a major peril.

Morris: I should say, yes.

B. May: Next we'd get up to Vada, just below the Donner Pass, and stayed there a few days.

Morris: Yes. There's still a tiny settlement there.

B. May: There the fishing was good and also you could begin some simple climbing and mountain walking, to little, often icy, lakes.

Morris: What kind of road surface was there?

B. May: Oh, lousy!

Morris: And how many other cars?

B. May: Usually we'd have three cars.

Morris: I was thinking about how many other cars you would meet. This was a problem on some of those mountain roads, wasn't it?

B. May: Yes. But people drove a bit cautiously then and used the horn vigorously on blind turns.

At last we'd get over Donner as far as Myers, or even to the lake.

Morris: I was just trying to visualize coming down from Myers Summit to Lake Tahoe.

B. May: Oh, it was then much higher and rougher, but spectacular. It looked as if a Valkyrie might step out from behind a rock any moment.

Morris: Did you get to drive?

B. May: Oh, those roads were too tough. I could drive in Berkeley and my father tried to persuade my mother that my sister and I could drive in the mountains, that anybody who could drive in Berkeley could drive any place. But she vetoed this.

Some summers we might go to Yosemite. The first time, we went in from Big Oak Flat by horse state and as the two youngest in that stageload, my small brother, six or seven, and I sat in the front with the driver. The driver gave Bill a loop in the reins to hold in his hand and he thought he was driving the team.

Morris: Lovely!

B. May: In these early trips the valley was fresh and green, with wild strawberries to pick on the floor. The first time I went to Glacier Point was one of these summers and there was great discussion as to transportation. There was no question but what my mother and an aunt who was along would ride. Father thought he'd walk. Bill rode a donkey. There was some doubt as to whether my cousin, my sister, and I could make fifteen miles without some aid, so Dad got us one horse and we rode and tied, the horse impatiently waiting for us as the two walkers straggled. I'm so glad they're now making it possible for people to see Yosemite, instead of automobiles.

Morris: If the fishing wasn't good at Tahoe, did you pack up and move on to Yosemite?

B. May: No. You'd go north along the Feather River. Fishing's not the best right in Yosemite. Even then the Merced was well fished out, that early.

One thing I'm told is that family automobiles did take many people to the mountains who'd never been willing to make the trek by horse and wagon or state. In the '90s, you could go to Tahoe by train, and then change to an entrancing lake steamer that went around the lake. You could either hop off wherever you were going or go around for a lovely day.

Morris: That sounds like something well worth bringing back.

World War I Begins

Morris: How were you aware of World War I about to happen out here in Berkeley?

B. May: We weren't. Those who followed foreign affairs closely had anticipated the explosive character of the situation in the Balkans, but this didn't touch students at Berkeley High or on campus. World War I began the August after we'd graduated from Berkeley High, but it didn't concern us for some time. It didn't occur to Westerners that the United States would be involved. At least it never occurred to anybody of my age at our level -- or perhaps better say lack -- of sophistication.

Morris: So that it wouldn't have any effect on whether you did or did not go on to the university in the fall?

B. May: No.

Morris: How about the kids at Berkeley High? Did most of them go on up the hill?

B. May: Yes. Most people who were going to college walked to campus and registered, with no fuss -- another reason that we tended to be cheerful. If you'd graduated from Berkeley High, there was no question. You might have a little trouble passing Subject A if you hadn't listened to Miss Christie, but that was the only worry. Not everybody went to college, but a large proportion of my classmates did.

Morris: Did you live at home?

B. May: Yes. We weren't so cut off from the rest of the world by the time we graduated in 1918. Many, many Americans were in the services and there was training for the air service, the navy and other services on campus.

Morris: I can imagine. There was air service training at Cal?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Now, that's interesting. In the East, the young men went up to Canada.

B. May: From here they went to Canada to enlist at the beginning of World War I. Later Cal had a large ground school and after it

B. May: the men took their flight training at Mather in Sacramento.

Morris: It occurs to me that it's an irony of history that in World War I, young men went to Canada in order to get into the war and in the '60s, they went to Canada to avoid military service.

B. May: That was the time in history for the army and for the people who stayed home as well. We, at least in the West and in our innocence, believed that this was the war to end war. I certainly won't believe it again until there is a reliable, democratic, peaceful method of resolving international disputes.

Not everybody, but on the whole most young people, thought, "This is hard on us, but this is going to fix it. This is going to end war."

Morris: What were the kinds of thinking that made that -- ?

B. May: This is what the President said and the basis of the war propaganda. We were sure that if the League of Nations were given more responsibility and power -- we'd forgotten they wouldn't do anything for old Haile Selassie; (he's still in trouble, poor out-dated old lion) -- but we thought if the league were better organized, then -- I'm not saying that the nation believed this, because obviously Americans let Hiram Johnson and the other four in the Congress scuttle our membership in the league, but most young people believed that the League of Nations could be made into a viable world government and that the U.S. was just the country to support it.

Morris: Then, as you went on in your college career, you did follow the war and the plans for the league?

B. May: Yes. We even read the newspapers! But in the beginning we didn't think we'd be involved and Wilson was reelected on that plank.

Morris: To keep us out of the war?

B. May: Yes.

Postwar Disillusionment

B. May: I think the reaction to the tremendous disillusionment when Wilson was unable to secure the United States' participation in a strengthened League of Nations brought on much of the excess of the flapper period.

A great many people, including me and many of my friends, took no further interest in public affairs for a long time. Instead we had lots of fun. Many of us drank too much. We went to Izzy Gomez's and were sorry if no violence broke out. We danced more frantically than ever. This was the period of the John Held short skirts with long beads and the Charleston. Those Held cartons were not exaggerated; that's the way we looked.

Morris: I was thinking that, yes.

B. May: And we wore our skirts, if anything, even shorter than girls have recently. I think the recent ones have been prettier, with the pantyhose. We were always in trouble with our underwear. This mood lasted a long time, until '29, and the Depression.

We had worked hard for the establishment of a viable League of Nations. With failure, we turned to having a good time. Most of us worked because most of us had to, but we never by any chance drew a serious breath after five o'clock.

Morris: That's a nice balance, I think.

B. May: We sat in the balconies of theaters and there was lots of light, frivolous theater, lots of wonderful music -- Paul Whiteman and "Rose Room." -- and danced Saturday afternoons.

Morris: Tea dances?

B. May: Yes. If your beau didn't have much money, and he usually didn't, you could go to the Palace or the Fairmont or the like and order one pot of tea. Later we'd have dinner at some place in North Beach, family style. Then if we still wanted to dance and we usually did, to one of the dance halls, which were perfectly respectable if you were. You paid a dime a dance or whatever. The old Trocadero was a fine place to dance to good music and lasted a long time.

Morris: Was dancing something new, or was it a new kind of dancing?

B. May: Yes and no. We danced a lot in college but also new kinds of dancing came in the '20s, like the Charleston, more strenuous and the trend to jitterbugging, with less dependence on your partner. When I was in college, we did elaborate dancing based on partnership -- the Boston, with lifts, the tango, the foxtrot variations.

Morris: Oh, lovely!

B. May: With lifts, we'd go up in the air, hoping we looked like Pavlova! I was rather a shy girl with little to say, but I'd gone to a good dancing school, could dance, and weighed only ninety pounds. So, you could tell I'd be no trouble with partners who were dancers.

Did you ever see "The Four Horsemen" -- Rudolph Valentino?

Morris: Oh, yes. Yes indeed.

B. May: Well, that's what we were trying to do.

Morris: That's right. And were the movies a large influence on any of this?

B. May: Yes, in starting the tango. Everybody learned to tango. My mother and father did; they were certainly well into their fifties when they learned to tango.

We did many variations to the waltz; often nameless like So-and-So's Twist. Always the last dance was a waltz. We didn't dance with the same man all evening. You were engaged, sure as shootin', if you danced more than the first, supper, and last with your escort.

Morris: Even when you went to the dance halls and the tea dancing?

B. May: We went to the dance halls in a group and then we danced with the men in it. We seldom went to hear singers or to see professional dancers except ballet.

Morris: More participation?

B. May: Much more participation and we were great dancers.

Morris: That's lovely.

B. May: As to drinking, a medical student, or preferably an intern, was good to know because he could bring you pure alcohol to mix with orange sherbet -- nauseating but safe.

Other weekends we sailed or rode horseback or walked in the park or at the beach or picnicked -- or climbed Mount Tam or fell around on skis. I've talked about dancing perhaps because today's dance forms look so different -- so lonely and so self righteous.

This has taken us well into the postwar days of '20s -- as for any care for the public weal, we retired, until with the Depression we developed a rudimentary social conscience.

University of California: 1914-18

(Date of Interview: April 5, 1974)

B. May: Let's go on with Cal first, don't you think?

Morris: Fine. When we were talking the other day, you described your friendship with Nan Barrows and other local girls and said you used to pool your car fare and buy a treat after school, and walk home instead. I wondered how many of those high school friendships continued on through your years at Cal?

B. May: A great many. It has surprised the young people now in my family when I say that there really was no question or much discussion at Berkeley High School of where you were going. The majority of us who went to college at all went to the University of California, then the only campus. A few people's lives were affected by the outbreak of the war in Europe, 1914.

Morris: Right after you'd graduated from high school.

B. May: I entered the university in 1914 at age sixteen, which at the moment seemed to be a handicap, but later on gave me more working time. The great change between Berkeley High School and the campus was the shock that students still have nowadays when they go from even a large high school, as Berkeley High was, to a large campus and to individual responsibility for your work, even for choosing your major and courses.

I fortunately knew that I wanted to work in the field of economics from the beginning, so that I didn't spend time changing my major. But I didn't always make the most useful selection of courses. One that I will never forget, memorable because I enjoyed

B. May: it so much, was a beginning course in Greek with a Greek scholar named Professor Allen. He was a fine scholar, but also easily put upon by students. We took his course at four o'clock in the afternoon on the top floor of old North Hall, windows open to campus trees. Professor Allen read Greek poetry beautifully. He read the Iliad and the Odyssey to us at our request and never noticed that we weren't learning any Greek at all. I got an "A," but it must have stood for attendance. I never went on with Greek which grieved my father, perhaps because he had been unable to go to the university himself.

I'd had a good grounding in Latin under Pop Smith at Berkeley High School, so I did continue Latin and took it all through my lower division years and again enjoyed it. But Greek was lost to me.

Morris: Did Professor Allen read the Iliad to you in Greek?

B. May: Of course. And with those great rhythm -- "the surge and thunder." If we wanted to know what he was reading -- some did and some didn't -- we read a pony [translation]. But the only word of Greek that I remember is "parsley," because I was so surprised to hear that the victors in games and others honored got wreaths of parsley.

Morris: Not laurel?

B. May: Laurel, too, but parsley was, in Homeric times, one of prized garlands -- roses also. So, what remains of one long semester's loafing is that I can say: "Tadi ta roda. Tadi ta roda. Tadi ta kala selena!" which means: "Here are roses for you. Here are roses. Here is your beautiful parsley."

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous.

Economics Studies

Morris: How did you happen to come into college knowing that you wanted to study economics? Wasn't that considered rather a deep subject for women?

B. May: In my own home and also at Berkeley High School, there was no heavy emphasis on: "This is a woman's occupation," and no great encouragement to break new ground either, but women were considered

B. May: persons. The supposed right of men to first choice in jobs came with depression and massive unemployment. The work that we'd had in high school on old age pensions and American institutions and the effect of taxation on the economy had interested me in econ.

Then, as I'm sure is demonstrated again and again in The Bancroft Library, the University of California pioneered with women as university professors. Jessica Peixotto was the first woman to be a full professor of economics at any American university. I consider myself peculiarly fortunate that I came to the university in time to study under her. She was a remarkable teacher and lecturer and adviser -- gray-haired, but still beautiful. Her family were Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain by the Catholic kings.

She had several remarkable ideas which, at this moment, are not very popular. One she emphasized in her teaching was a pragmatic approach to social or governmental problems. She said you should design your program in relation to the essential problem -- the environment, the character of the people. Do not come in with a new theory of structure of government or type of relief without knowing the situation, the capacity of the people, what the land will support. I expect modifying changes as you go along. She fought for years against the establishment of a department of sociology at the University of California because she said the sociologist says in his book-lined study, "It ought to be such and such." She said, "I believe in going to look at what's there and then planning with the people you're going to work with, what your solution could be."

She gave a famous course no longer given at the university because, I think, the spirit of the time has changed. This was "Contemporary Theories of Social Reform" for which we read Das Kapital, Kropotzin, and Henry George on the single tax, and others -- in one course. At the end we were not asked for conclusions, but we had been exposed to workshops in France, experiments in communal living in the United States, a whole galaxy of approaches -- anarchy, communism, etc.

She collaborated with another distinguished woman professor, Dean Lucy Ward Stebbins, who specialized in courses on welfare. They gave together a course on causes of poverty, in which I can remember one or both of them saying, "This needs to be talked about because poverty exists, because we think you'll get tired of sending an ambulance to the bottom of the precipice instead of building a fence across the top."

B. May: Many of their students had effective professional careers throughout California. On campus two women became noted academicians who worked under them as students -- Dr. Emily Huntington, professor of economics, and Dr. Barbara Armstrong, professor of law.

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous.

B. May: So, you see, this was strong influence for liberal reform.

Morris: Yes. Was this considered a controversial course by students?

B. May: Not by students of economics. There were many students in the economics department whose interests were primarily in importing and exporting, or some other specialized --

Morris: Money and banking.

B. May: Many took "Contemporary Theories of Social Reform" because it was famous but not required. Since students paid very little attention to what citizens on the outside were doing or saying, I don't know whether there were outside protests or not.

Among other courses I took was "Problems of Labor Organization."

Morris: That was an interesting time in the American labor movement.

B. May: This course was given by Leon Blum. An interest in the labor movement was beginning as a student interest, not that we did much about it, but learn to sing "Solidarity Forever." [Laughter]

Morris: On campus? It's a lovely song.

B. May: [Laughter] Not in class, but we sang it at parties. It was a very popular song, you know, and it innoculated us with the feeling that people could and should organize to protect their rights.

Morris: What would have been in the course work? That was before the great labor legislation had begun to be passed.

B. May: Principles of organization, by-laws, union objectives, negotiation, arbitration, strikes, the futility of violence on both sides, the history of some of the historic strikes. It was not with any intent of training us to be labor officials. The professional labor official hadn't developed into a separate occupation as it has today and I'm not sure what Professor Blum would have thought about that change.

Campus Activities

B. May: In my lower division years, my memories of the campus and campus activities are of students whose interests were engaged on campus. I worked on the Cal which ran little or no outside news. You could try out for the Cal staff when you were a sophomore. Girls and men did the same kind of reporting until we got to the last semester of our junior year, were, if we hung on, we became junior editors. Then the women were normally assigned stories of women's activities and proposed the stories that reporters should be sent to.

As a senior, and this sounds very old-fashioned, I was women's editor of the Daily Cal. This post had been recently inaugurated and I had two or three predecessors, but it was still unusual for a woman to hold a senior appointment. Women editors participated in discussion and decisions on the paper, but the title would be considered nowadays patronizing on the part of the men's staff. Nobody thought much about it then.

Morris: Oh, well, it ran all the way through journalism -- the women's page as a place staffed by women.

B. May: It was fun working on the Cal; especially as freshmen and sophomores.

Morris: As a member of the editorial board, did you get paid?

B. May: Oh, no!

Morris: Oh, that's too bad.

B. May: I don't agree with you! I think paying people to volunteer has taken the edge off the enjoyment of working as a team. Instead it becomes a routine job. I think it lowers the zest and the validity of the person's interest in the cause they're working for.

Today's cant includes scorn for a money-based culture. If critics of the present believe money corrupts why make it the test of a "meaning-full" occupation?

A special women's activity on campus was a great pageant called the Parthenia. You see, we all related romantically to Greece.

Morris: What happened to it?

B. May: It died with the war, perhaps. It was held in Faculty Glade, outdoors, and book, lyrics, and much of the music were written or adapted by women students; it involved several hundred women in the cast.

Morris: It was that large?

B. May: Yes. All the campus came to see how lovely the girls looked in Grecian costumes.

Morris: I've seen some photographs. They're handsome; they really are.

B. May: Prytanean [women's honor society] held a money-raiser called a fete, modeled after the entertainment section of a county fair, with sideshows. The city let us close Telegraph Avenue because we always had closed Telegraph Avenue for free and as our come-on we danced in the middle of Telegraph. From Bancroft to Sather Gate merchants lent their sidewalks or room inside their stores. You could get your fortune told or buy things to eat or see and hear a chorus, dancers or singers. The fete brought public complaints. It was said, "Those students go too far. They take off too much, they sing improper songs."

We would invite, as I recall, the men's honor societies to help us, and they did. A woman was chairman and usually a man was vice-chairman. The year I was chairman, both the vice-president and I had to see the dean of women.

Morris: Oh, dear! What did you do?

B. May: I've forgotten what we were doing which was criticized. Maybe the can-can dancers. Had I known the Bancroft wanted all this, I would have written notes.

Morris: You would have saved all these memories. That's a marvelous contrast, the classical Greek and then the --

B. May: Yes. And we enjoyed them both.

Morris: I can imagine.

Social Concerns

B. May: We held the fete to support the student health center. Prytanean, some years before I came to college, had decided that what the university students needed most was health service. No one would have paid us to start it. In fact, many weren't eager for its inauguration. Prytanean Society rented or bought an old house on Piedmont Avenue, hired a small health staff, and put in order a few bedrooms for sick students.

Morris: As an infirmary?

B. May: It was called the Infirmary and Prytanean worked for years for its support until a fee for health service was added to the students' registration fee and service expanded.

My mother, having her own plan for her family's health care, never let me go to the Infirmary. But there are many tales of what happened in those free-wheeling days when it was a volunteer institution.

Morris: It was an outpatient service?

B. May: Outpatient or bed care.

Morris: Was this co-ed, or was this just for women students?

B. May: This was co-ed. Oh, we liked men and felt they'd a right to live.

Morris: Yes, but I was thinking of the small house on Piedmont Avenue -- quite an undertaking for a student group.

B. May: This is what volunteers can do, without the burden of recruiting and paying staff (except medical staff).

I also belonged to the YWCA, which widened my horizon as to the varieties of religious experience. I had been brought up as an Episcopalian and it never occurred to me that anybody made up prayers.

Morris: They were there in the book.

B. May: I was surprised but intrigued, until I was called upon to pray myself. Fortunately, I remembered a short Collect and repeated it and several people said, "What a beautiful prayer." I had to confess that it came from the Book of Common Prayer.

B. May: The YWCA and the YMCA were the chief campus organizations that were reaching, not too successfully, for interracial experiences, at a time that Chinese and Japanese and other orientals outnumbered the Negro on campus.

Morris: I would imagine.

B. May: Yes. There were few blacks, though I remember sitting next to Judge Walter Gordon in psychology. Then he was Walt Gordon, the football player. He, as you know, has had a truly distinguished career.

Morris: Yes. I understand he is living back in the Berkeley area.

B. May: He and Elizabeth are in Berkeley again. He is one of those who made today's Berkeley. It wasn't until later when I knew his wife, Elizabeth Gordon, in connection with Asilomar that I realized the trouble they had in travel and housing when they were a young married couple.

Involvement in World War I

B. May: As I said earlier, the war didn't affect us greatly in the beginning. Woodrow Wilson had been elected on a platform of "America's not coming," to the tune of "I Didn't Raise My Boy to be a Soldier."

Morris: That's a poignant song, somehow.

B. May: The United States and certainly the West was deeply opposed to entering a European quarrel on the side of an obsolete monarchy, in a quarrel between Austria and the Slavic states she had annexed.

Morris: One forgets that part of it.

B. May: A young revoluntionary had shot the heir to the emperorship of Austria-Hungary, and quickly the Kaiser attacked and soon Europe was at war. But it became a different matter when American ships were attacked and American citizens were killed. This is history as written then. Now, it is not certain that the ships on which American citizens were passengers were not also carrying war materials, but then we believed they were not.

B. May: During the first war years, men from Berkeley went to Canada and volunteered, many of them for Royal Air Force. A University of California group organized a volunteer ambulance corps -- some from campus, others recent graduates. This later became the American Field Service. By 1917 the U.S. had the draft and there were training units on campus which involved the majority of the men students.

We were sustained in high spirits and patriotic songs by the belief that this was the last war. Some people like my father didn't believe that, but probably couldn't bear to tell us so. Young people, at any rate, believed what Wilson and others were saying: "When we get this done, we are going to devise a peace treaty and a strengthening of the League of Nations to prevent more world wars. We will be able to control war." We believed it.

I tried to go overseas for the Red Cross, but I was too young and they wouldn't take me. So, I finished at Cal. My young brother sold war bonds and I was a salesman for him and we knitted constantly. We knitted in class.

Morris: Balaklava helmets?

B. May: Oh, helmets, socks, scarfs, sweaters. The Red Cross found tasks that we could do at home. We inspected and reknit socks that weren't pairs and so on.

Morris: Oh, marvelous.

B. May: And we wore fetching costumes with Red Cross veils and raised Red Cross funds, but we never heard a shot fired in anger. When the men got back from France, they said, "It really was awful. It just really was awful."

And then, to carry with our theories about the war, we had believed firmly that this could be the last general war. Then President Wilson was defeated at the peace convention in Paris, in part because he lacked the political skills or the foreign experience to deal with the conference. He made the fatal mistake of not asking representatives from Congress to go to Paris. When Wilson came back, it was obvious that five senators (one of them unfortunately from California, Hiram Johnson, who had been a great liberal as a governor) were against the League of Nations and determined to defeat American support of it. Wilson, as you know, made a direct appeal to citizens and, of course, we all went to hear him in the Greek Theater. [September 18, 1919]

B. May: When the Congress rejected the League of Nations, it created a disillusioned younger generation. I think the shock to our faith in the structure of democracy was great and took long to revive, as we've said elsewhere. I don't mean that we were as completely turned off as Gertrude Stein's "lost generation," but on our level we were. We didn't care about politics. Oh, we might vote, maybe yes, maybe no. We had a free-wheeling time and didn't concern ourselves about public affairs in any way.

Later I changed my mind and remembered the training and ideas that I'd experienced at the University of California. I had there, on the whole, an exciting introduction to ideas that influenced my life. I've always been happy to have been a member of student organizations -- Phi Beta Kappa, Prytanean, Cal staff, and others.

I didn't graduate with my class in 1918 because I had had some health problems and had been out part of that semester. So, I finished up in 1919.

Bernice Hubbard
1920

IV CAREER IN ADULT EDUCATION: 1923-1945

UC Extension Division

Morris: How did you happen to go to work for the Extension?

B. May: I had hoped to continue at the university in graduate study -- without which I could not find a position related to my major interest at that time -- but I never had the money. By the time I graduated from Cal in 1919, the Depression had begun, hitting first those, like my family, whose income came from agriculture.

My first job on leaving the campus was with an advertising department of a large shoe store. I sold shoes by mail, six days a week, eight hours a day. I was glad that I was able to write my own letters. I couldn't type, but fortunately this small advertising department, of three members, used an early dictating machine, or sometimes a stenographer. But part of whatever success I had as an administrator, is that I don't type and so never stuck in a secretarial job. Today typing is no longer a sex-linked skill.

Later the Placement Bureau got me a fascinating clerical job, one of those made obsolete by the computer. I was a reinsurance clerk in a marine insurance office, assistant to the loss surveyor. Under contracts and coverage, we distributed risks or losses between a number of insurance companies. My chief surveyed losses on ships or at docks and taking me along was unthinkable. He needed a man, not a girl Friday, he said.

It was obvious that a woman would not be promoted beyond the office job that I had learned. I was thinking about looking for another one, although I liked the office and the people in it,

B. May: when the placement secretary on campus telephoned me about a vacancy in the San Francisco information office of the Extension Division, and found it would put me in charge of the San Francisco Kearney Street office with one relief assistant. Another attraction of the job was hours from ten to six.

In the '20s there was public concern for women working alone in offices. So a wonderful, old, Irish cop on the beat usually came in and spent ten or fifteen minutes between five and six, with me, standing conspicuously to be seen from the street.

Morris: That was nice of him.

B. May: Under present population pressure, police departments do not have sufficient personnel for such protective services. My cop told me tales about Kearney Street and about his life. He was a great hunter, according to him.

In that office, I learned to approach the person who is seeking information and advice but is shy and reluctant. You tell them, and then tell them what you just told them, and then summarize it -- as in a political speech.

At that time, much work given by University Extension was remedial -- English for the foreign born or accounting, or business letters and public speaking. We had few applicants for university work. Evening night schools were also developing and one of the controversies in adult education was the question of duplication.

Those of us who were working with adult students felt that wide options and plenty of choice was good. When the time came that we had covered, as we hoped, the large backlog of students who couldn't speak English, or of those who wanted short story writing, extensions hopefully would devote themselves to university instruction.

In the '20s, the Extension Division received little or no support from general university funds. Must make our own budget. The first Extension Division courses were offered by the University of California in 1897, the year in which I was born. Professor [Leon J.] Richardson had been the director of the Extension Division for many years, not since '97, and well-known in adult education. I was appointed in '24 or '25, class organizer for Northern California. Eventually my title became

B. May: executive secretary, instead of class organizer -- a very strange title.

Morris: Yes.

B. May: Once when I was registering to vote, the volunteer registrar said to me, "Good heavens! Are you organizing the class war now?" But it was a specific title, because that's what I did. I dreamed up ideas for classes that I thought would be popular, often with the help of persons who hoped to teach and consulted departments.

Morris: Over here on campus?

B. May: The relevant department must approve the course, instructor and his training. Departments normally approved any course we wanted to give without credit, but were, and I feel rightly, very careful about granting credit. As time went on, a few students took enough credit courses to get degrees -- to do part time. I remember a woman, named Reynolds, who got an AB in her sixties, and was so stimulated by the work she'd taken in drama and English, that she went to Hollywood and got good parts for years.

In about '25, the university allowed us to buy the old Elks Club on Powell Street. Building and Grounds was sorry because, do you know what those crazy people in the Extension Division wanted? Not chairs properly fastened to the floor; chairs you could move around and big tables, round if possible, that students could sit around and put elbows on. Furthermore, Extension wanted to paint the walls green and blue and even yellow.

Adult Education Associations

Morris: Oh, marvelous. This was your idea?

B. May: It was an Extension Division idea. Mr. Richardson liked it particularly, the movable chairs and so on, because this was an idea running around in adult education circles. This was the time that Carnegie put ten or five years of grants into local and national Associations of Adult Education, which didn't survive the end of the money, but we had a good time blowing it! We had meetings in New York, at which very little

B. May: new was said because we each had to speak to get travel expense.

In 1929, with Dr. Richardson's support and at my own expense, I represented the University Extension at the World Conference on Adult Education at Cambridge University, England -- a large session, hopeful that adult education could be a force for peace. This hope became futile in 1940.

In the '30s Meiklejohn started his San Francisco school, which, like its predecessors, died when the money ran out.

Morris: Was he part of the Extension?

B. May: No. He'd come cross country. He was a magnificent teacher and philosopher, but he never could get along with the university with which he was associated. By the time he got to San Francisco (I think it was Carnegie money for him too), he established an independent school which lasted three or four years or more. As a teacher, he was splendid. He had a good staff of young men, some of whom moonlighted by teaching for Extension also. They added greatly to our local Association of Adult Education.

Since I'm dropping names, Dean Rusk was teaching at Mills at that time and in charge of the little adult education that Mills did, but he too was a great addition to the association.

New ideas were abundent -- We read the men who taught at the New School for Social Research. Harry Allen Overstreet was one of their great prophets, particularly of the discussion method, which is so facilitative.

Morris: Round table and movable chairs, yes.

B. May: I don't remember whether Harry Allen was here before or during or after the Carnegie organization. He taught at Cal's summer session (he was a Berkeley graduate), and I took courses with him two summers. He was a great boy for singing. We would begin class with "Happy Days Are Here Again."

Morris: Wonderful!

B. May: My criticism of his method was that he was satisfied with discussion without evaluation of its result. Since he was offering a new approach, he was delighted if he got us speaking out because the lecture method was still greatly appreciated by Americans and thought of as a time-saver all around.

Morris: Even in graduate and professional kinds of classes?

B. May: Yes, frequently.

Morris: Did you yourself begin to teach some of the courses?

B. May: No. I prefer management.

Workers' Education

Morris: In Leon Richardson's discussion of his career,* he mentioned an advisory committee to the education division, which was an impressive committee. I wondered if that came out of the New School of Social Research. Paul Scharrenberg was on it and Professor Peixotto.

B. May: No. The New School operated only in New York. Our labor courses were older than it was, organized by John Kirchen, a local AFL man. Extension ran a special group of courses for labor in San Francisco, which Kirchen recruited and planned. He had a local labor advisory committee as planning support, and my office handled the administrative affairs.

Later, a rival school of labor education was organized independently and took that source of students away from us, because the labor people felt they should run their own training.

Morris: This is the one that was taken over by the CIO eventually?

B. May: Yes. There weren't really students enough for both.

Morris: I gather that Professor Richardson was concerned that there might be some communist overtones to this whole department.

B. May: There probably had been some criticism of Extension courses presented from one viewpoint, but ours was milder than the CIO-organized school. I recall no protests of Extension Money and Banking courses.

Morris: Was Mr. Kirchen a union man himself?

---

*See memoir in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley,

B. May: Yes, on the staff before I came to the Extension Division. I found him interesting and cooperative. He was a craft union man and retired after the activists and the CIO took over his Extension project.

Morris: Professor Richardson also described lectures on Americanization.

B. May: Those were before my time. The English for foreigners' classes were a holdover from this, and so was American Institutions, taken by students planning to enter the university and by many in-migrants.

Americanization courses to integrate in-migrants were given all over the country under the push and shove of John Collier, who later became the Collier in the Department of the Interior, who headed, but not as successfully, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs.

[To the transcript, Mrs. May added the following comments:]

Lists of courses could go on and on -- Petroleum Production, Current Events, Foreign Trade, Law for non-professionals. But titles of courses are not the essence of Extension -- which was built on good teaching. Without good teaching, no students. From my seventeen years a meager sample of excellent communicators would include Philip Buck, Dr. Donald Macfarlane, Alfred Frankenstein, Henry Cowell, Margaret Tilley, Alice Farrington, Ira B. Cross, Malcolm Davisson, Madre Merrill, Charles Hogan and Marshall Harbinson.

Brother Leo of St. Mary's College, our greatest spellbinder and money-maker, in the Depression gave Shakespeare or Dante to three hundred students at a time -- the room capacity. He agreed with the critic (Menkin or Erskine?) who called discussion groups "pooled ignorance." Meanwhile, in smaller Extension classes discussion -- today's "rap session" flourished.

More important than method in adult education is the concept of starting at the student's level -- not the teachers' -- For example, Alfred Frankenstein gave history of music beginning with the nineteenth century greats and working later on modern and primitive.

Times of Trouble
(Date of Interview: April 10, 1974)

[The April 4, 1974, University Charter Day speaker was historian Barbara Tuchman. Mrs. May and her niece, Jane Stephens, had been listening to a recording of her address.]

B. May: John F. [Kennedy] said that we're coming into the era of the common man. I think this is the new faith that will bring change, just as Tuchman described, the impulse from Greece, the impulse when the people pushed ahead of the Turks, which sparkplugged the Renaissance.

All the great periods she talked about were at the top of the pyramid; they were all upper middle class and wealthy movements. When she said Michelangelo's frescoes of slaves showed men and their wish for freedom, she was right; they're the only slaves that ever got freedom, the slaves of the rich, the slaves who'd been educated.

Through all periods of change, the food was grown either by slaves or serfs attached to the land, whereas we've democracy and free labor. I grant you, democracy's a very tender flower; we don't seem able to transplant it readily. But it is a new idea perhaps as fruitful as a new religion or a new ideal. The signs are few and far between in all of the West, but they're there.

Morris: I think we must hope so because the signs of trouble are many and close at hand.

B. May: Yes. But many signs of trouble indicate a desire for democracy. I don't agree with my black friends who beat on whites and preach "reverse" discrimination. But I hope that their refusal to live within the confines of the improved status of blacks, that they aren't content with slow progress, is a recognition of our need for an inclusive society. Of course, this is hope and I thought Tuchman was hopeless.

You see, Jane's a mother with entrancing children and I'm not a mother. I'm one of the revolting women of the '20s who weren't and didn't have children because the United States failed the League of Nations. We were hopeless and inactive, too.

Morris: It was a conscious decision not to have any children?

B. May: Yes. I'm not saying there were large numbers of us. We didn't do what a friend of mine who does have children proposed to me one day as we were leaving a meeting on population growth. "Let's run over a child on the way home!" We felt, "Look, we fought a war to end war. We had a plan. If the world doesn't want it, why should we invite anybody into it?"

So, I think we were wrong, as I think the kids are wrong now, in attempting to destroy and to be negative on the establishment. We should have hung in there and worked against competitive military budgets and compaigned for peaceful means to resolve international disputes.

Living Near North Beach

Morris: We are just about through with your years at the Extension, but I have a few more questions. At what point did you move into San Francisco to make life simpler and more interesting?

B. May: As soon as possible after my employment by the Extension Division in charge of the Information Office on Kearney Street office.

Morris: Did your family object to your going into the city and moving off on your own?

B. May: No. In fact, I think many families at our income level felt that they'd supported, directly and through taxation, children through four years at the university and it was now up to us to make a life.

One of the outlets for women was, of course, to get married, without a great deal of pressure for early marriage. One of the current sayings was, "Men are like streetcars. There'll be another one in a few minutes." This was part of our social pattern and long before "going steady." Young women were considered not quite nice if always going about with the same man.

Morris: Where did you live in the city?

B. May: First in San Francisco in a bilingual boarding house, of which there were a good many. Ours was English-Spanish speaking and this was fun. I roomed with a Berkeley girl, Corena Daugherty, with whom I had gone to grammar school, high school, and Cal.

B. May: She had a job collecting news and selling ads for a toy trade magazine.

Morris: What fun.

B. May: Most university women at that time did not go into clerical or stenographic positions. Some did, but it was a matter of choice; you weren't shunted there.

After a year of boarding house life, we rented an apartment, cautiously. One of our mothers had said, "I'd just as soon you didn't have an apartment on the first floor." We found one in a hillside apartment house on Union Street near North Beach. We looked out of the back window about four or five stories down. Then, after we had said, "We'll take it," we glanced in the other direction and there were more windows. But in careless youth, neither of us looked out of those, from which one could step in from or on the up hillside.

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous.

B. May: But we were entranced with the view and paid the rent. Thereafter, I lived in San Francisco from about '24 to '38.

Planning Curriculum

Morris: I came across mention of a report written by Dr. Armin Leuschner in 1931. Would this have been something that you were involved in? This was a study on the role of the Extension and the future. I wondered if that would have involved your daily activities?

B. May: I don't remember it. This may have been one of the many academic committees that from time to time reviewed the Extension activities and the kind of instruction that we gave. Most such reports recommended, it seemed to me as an administrator rightly, that as soon as it was practical, universities should turn over remedial work to the evening high schools, supported in part by ADA,* with lower fees and in touch with the junior college or high school instructors needed for make-up courses.

---

*Average Daily Attendance, the formula at the time for basic financial support from the State Department of Education.

B. May: We covered this point earlier, but it should be clear that at the University of California, we earned our class budget in the Extension Division for a very long time, and helped pay for correspondence courses, all through Mr. Richardson's regime. Extension earned its own budget chiefly on large elementary courses which paid for some university work, as football paid for track and crew went without or raised its own support.

Later, after World War II, when he and I had been long gone, the university did make appropriations for Extension, so that it was no longer necessary to discontinue a class not breaking even. In my day, fifteen students was the breakeven point and difficult to continue smaller classes often greatly needed, like advanced mathematics. Perhaps fifteen students had started algebra or trigonometry, and it would be heartbreaking when they got down to four or five for calculus. I could continue a few classes by special permission from the director, but that didn't absolve me from making the budget.

So, I thoroughly approve of an appropriation that gives Extension financial security and freedom.

Morris: Dean Richardson kept his main office here in Berkeley. And then you were running the class program for all Northern California?

B. May: Yes. I had an office in Cal Hall on campus and commuted the reverse way for office hours at least from ten until twelve daily.

Morris: In Berkeley?

B. May: In the Berkeley office, where I had Dr. Richardson's guidance, office and recording help, and a quiet private office. Assistant Director Boyd B. Rakestran gave help on the budget. Here I planned and organized the total program, including requests from other communities. We ran regularly scheduled programs in Oakland, to be visited in the evening as was our largest center downtown on Powell Street.

Morris: Were most of your students working in the financial district, in the business district?

B. May: Both the financial district and the downtown general office and retail business. The firms that surrounded us then were the kind still there. We gave many courses that were cultural as well as related to people's occupations -- fiction writing, history of music, foreign languages, dramatics. Public speaking was mixed, some signed up for interest and self-improvement and others enrolled because they needed speech skills.

B. May: We gave one of the first courses for adults in rapid reading. We thought this was going to be a great remedial course, but everybody who came read very rapidly and wanted to read faster. The man who taught the course, a young Dr. James Hamilton, got a book out of it which sold very well for a long time but is out of print now.

Morris: Did you have much autonomy, then, in running -- ?

B. May: Subject to the approval of the department concerned. Most departments concerned themselves primarily with the courses given for credit. They were willing to take our recommendation in regard to courses of general public interest, though once in a while they thought we were getting a little too fancy, and then it would be advisable to change the title of the course.

Morris: I see. For instance?

B. May: For instance, one, the first title of which implied that you'd come out of it with charisma and a charming personality, but which did well with some such title as "Interpersonal Relationships." The university was right; when it put an obligation on a staff to make money, it had to watch standards and prevent over-selling.

Morris: I see. Dean Richardson was quite proud of the Extension Division being self-supporting.

B. May: Yes. Well, we made a virtue of necessity. This was a good point for taxpayers and the public generally, but I'm sure Leon J. Richardson would not have turned down money if the university had been able to supply it for lack of it was a handicap.

Depression and General Strike

B. May: This was especially true during the '30s, during the Depression. A new type of student then came for recreation, quite willing to pay for literature or foreign languages as a substitute for more expensive entertainment.

Morris: Even though they were out of work, they did have enough money for Extension?

B. May: Everybody wasn't out of work but many people had salary cuts and many were helping others.

Morris: Spreading their income further?

B. May: Yes. All of us knew someone who maybe could make it with just a little bit of help. In my particular group of friends, we didn't support artists or poets, but we bought funny little handwritten shares from a man who was inventing a basic component of early television, obsolete now.

He was Phil Farnsworth who invented the cold cathode tube.* He made a good thing out of it. In the end, some of us made a little money, but we all got our money back, which was just sheer luck. He and his co-workers, of course, had to have other jobs, some to support families. We investors went after work to model for him in a loft at the foot of Telegraph Hill. He'd pick up our picture and then you'd look the length of the loft and you would see a wavering --

Morris: Image of yourself?

B. May: Or a ghostly image of a friend.

Morris: That's fascinating. How did you become acquainted with him?

B. May: Through sailing. I sailed a lot out of Belvedere on week-ends, and one of the engineers who crewed on this bird boat brought Farnsworth, for whom he had been putting up money. I checked for some of the other women of the group by speaking to the college of engineering, to Dr. Lester Rukema, who taught courses for the Extension Division. He taught, as far as we knew, the only Extension course scheduled at midnight for motion picture operators and since they had irregular working hours, the class met at midnight.

Morris: After the movie closed.

B. May: I explained to Dr. Rukema as best I could, and probably erroneously, the basic principle on the tube. He said, "Who is this you're thinking of giving money to as an investment?"

---

*See "Tom Swift in San Francisco: Philo T. Farnsworth and His Electric Television," James Minton, San Francisco, November, 1972. Copy in Mrs. May's papers in The Bancroft Library.

B. May: I said, "I haven't got very much money, so don't worry about it. It'll be $50 or $100 at a time." He said, "Farnsworth?" [I said,] "Yes."

He said, "If I told you I could make that tube, I wouldn't advise you to invest in it, because I know it can't be done. But he doesn't know it can't be done and he'll probably do it."

Morris: Farnsworth operated pretty much by himself throughout his inventing career, didn't he? He had a small group of people he worked with, but never was in the mainstream of television development.

B. May: He wasn't primarily interested in television. He was interested in the other problems and the cold cathode tube's other uses, but it turned out to be a transition stage. He died quite young and perhaps would have gone on with other inventions and adaptations. After we had got him on his feet -- when I say "we," this was our amorphous group of inventors and investors -- we stopped having these pep meetings.

But he saw to it that we were all advised when he thought was a good time to sell out, at the time that he was selling his patents to one of the developing television manufacturers. Later it was bought by ITT.

Morris: That's an interesting finale.

B. May: So, some people hung on and got ITT shares, but I sold and got my money back, as I recall it, about $400 and a small profit.

Morris: That's a fascinating footnote.

Since Extension was giving labor education courses, I wondered if the General Strike in 1934 affected Extension at all or if you were particularly aware of it, living in San Francisco.

B. May: I was aware of it, but more aware of it from being at our office. By then, our courses in labor education and our special organizer for labor courses were things of the past. The General Strike was CIO and chiefly on the waterfront.

Wishing to keep the trouble on a local basis, they said either the university or the governor asked General Hugh Johnson, at that time heading NRA, which was the Roosevelt administration's agency which was hopefully going to reorganize the planning for industry and labor -- anyway, whoever it was who had invited General Johnson west wired "Please don't come and we'll cancel

B. May: the meeting in the Greek Theater. It's no time for meetings when there's fighting up and down the waterfront." But he came anyway saying he wanted to see what was here and if anybody wanted to shoot him they were welcome!

We went to hear him speak in the Greek Theater, but his good offices were not received very well, either by labor or by the state -- this was another time they called out the National Guard. There was much feeling, though I think not universal feeling, on the part of university students that Professor Barrows should not have been allowed to command the National Guard at the time of a major labor dispute. But I'm sure that others felt that this was an appropriate thing for him to have done.

Morris: He was not yet president?

B. May: He was a professor of political science. I mention it because this again is an example of the question of the relation of the university professor to what is going on in the world -- and I think most of us tend to approve or disapprove according to our feeling towards the cause at the time.

Morris: Was the issue a question of effects of the Depression on workers or was it labor's right to organize?

B. May: It was primarily the right to organize, the question of organizing the longshoremen and other workers concerned with shipping on the waterfront. It preceded Harry Bridges and the CIO's successful effort to organize the waterfront in Hawaii.

There may have been and probably were other issues, no doubt a wage issue, but as I recall it the primary question was: Will these men be allowed to organize and must the employers accept it?

Morris: Did the students and your friends as post-graudates have any position or get involved in it at all?

B. May: Not anybody that I knew. While it was an iffy question for academic personnel, administrative personnel well knew that they'd better not be out organizing someone else's union, that certainly would have been frowned on. As a woman, I wouldn't have been welcome anyway. There were no women in the Teamsters then.

Morris: No, that does seem a contradiction.

Sidelight on General Johnson, the NRA, and Phi Beta Kappa

B. May: Yes. In the to-do over General Johnson, who was a graduate of Cal Berkeley, it appeared that he had been eligible for Phi Beta Kappa in his junior year on a grade points basis. The policy, as you probably know, at California and other Phi Beta chapters, was and still is that any student who makes a high scholarship record as a junior is automatically invited to be a member of Phi Beta Kappa. It seems that General Johnson had been skipped by error as a Cal undergraduate. So Phi Beta Kappa invited him to be initiated on this visit. After the speech, some of us who were Phi Beta Kappa members thought we'd like to see the great man initiated.

Phi Beta Kappa, in case you don't know it, is a secret society with a doorkeeper. It was founded as a secret society at William and Mary's during the Revolution, in 1776. Has a grip, pass word, all that.

So, we went and the doorkeeper was a sweet, mild, little man, much of an academician. The crowd was large, supporters of both sides of the strike. Initiation was held at Stephens Union, in one of the big lounges with those great, heavy doors. There came the knock at the door and the doorkeeper stuck his head out and mildly inquired who was there. The response from the general's sponsor and escort was "Hugh Johnson." So the doorkeeper threw the door wide open and in came the sponsor and the general and the general's secretary, Miss Robbie Robinson, who accompanied him every place, and two bodyguards. As far as I can see, all were initiated into Phi Beta Kappa because nobody had the guts to toss any one out!

The irreverent in the back rows were clutching each other and giggling snobbishly, but no harm seems to have been done to anyone or to Phi Beta Kappa.

Morris: They survived the experience.

B. May: It's a brief, snappy ritual, just as well for the number of people initiated nowadays. I noticed the other day that 290 undergraduates on the Berkeley campus had qualified for automatic election to Phi Beta Kappa.

President Roosevelt's Planning and Social Goals

Morris: You said that Johnson was coming out here for a planning meeting, a national recovery kind of thing?

B. May: He was coming officially. He had been invited to make this speech on campus before the General Strike began. So he didn't take kindly to the suggestion that he wait for calmer times. He felt, and I think rightly, that delay would show that he favored employers when he hoped that he could at least serve as a negotiator. He refused to change his plans and I admired that. NRA was declared unconstitutional rather shortly after this episode.

Morris: Yes, I remember.

B. May: So, we don't know what might have been accomplished by joint economic planning by American industry and labor.

Morris: To bring all of the major parties to economic activity together.

B. May: This is the kind of planning many people are saying should be done in production nowadays. NRA was never a popular agency and not even the president fought very hard for it, but, of course, we were getting into so many troubles then.

President Roosevelt, it seemed to me as an observer, was always being restrained from establishing ongoing agencies, rather than the relief agencies.

Morris: In other words, Roosevelt was mostly interested in setting up permanent agencies, rather than --

B. May: I wouldn't say mostly, but I think he felt the need for planning to prevent trouble rather than for temporary relief. It was said among the health insurance advocates that he would have added health insurance if he hadn't received so much negative advice from politicians and so-called experts that he might lose immediate relief funds if he tried to get an ongoing program.

Morris: For health insurance?

B. May: For health insurance and for other social insurance.

Morris: You said that it was not until the Depression that you decided that it was worth becoming involved in causes.

B. May: Oh, no! Not until I married a political scientist!

Morris: I see. About when did this happen?

B. May: My husband and I were married in 1940. One of his staff is supposed to have said, "Oh, he'll be wasted on her. She's never even had one course in poli sci." But we had been going about together for some time and active in a campaign for state health insurance. You know, we lost in '38.

Morris: That was Olson's effort and then Warren dusted off the idea again in 1945.

B. May: Not the same bill.

Morris: Did you campaign for the Olson bill?

B. May: We supporters went to the legislature as a body, as spectators or interviewed legislators. I didn't know enough to lobby. I was learning as I went along.

Engineering, Science, and Management War Training

B. May: Then in 1940, we found ourselves in the war preparedness period. One of the plans that had already been made in Washington was for the participation of American universities in the training for war industry.

The University of California had one of the federal grants, of which there were ten or fifteen in the country. Dean Morrough P. O'Brian, special fields -- fluid mechanics and hydraulics, dean of engineering at Cal-Berkeley, headed ESMWT on campus. He asked me to join his administrative staff and to become a specialist in technical and sub-professional jobs for women in war industry. I was glad to accept. I had some background for this because in the extension class department we had given much work in engineering, stepped up during the preparedness period. I had also worked with most of the men in the college of engineering who were hoping to go into the federal training program.

During the period when the war training project was being projected, the extension division felt they should have it and the college of engineering felt that it was concerned primarily with engineering and technology, and that it would be more

B. May: effective if engineers ran it. This was a dispute between bureaucrats, bitter interdepartmental politics. Extension felt their staff knew all about adult education. Engineering said ESMWT was based on engineering. (Other specialties -- science and management were added later, still closely related to engineering.) The college was not about to allow their graduates or other engineers to be trained by Extension, which was in their eyes, an administrative unit and not a professional one. Eventually engineering won out and then annoyed Extension by hiring me.

Morris: Yes, I can see that would be --

B. May: In late 1940 I was no longer working for Extension. I had resigned after Mr. Richardson's retirement because I saw no further advancement for me there. I heard -- but perhaps this was campus scuttlebutt that only two men -- Paul Cadnon and Robert Gordon Sproul thought I should at least be considered for the directorship. Of course, the regents could not have appointed me since I didn't have even a Master's, let alone a Ph.D. -- undoubtedly a requirement at that time for the directorship, normally held by a faculty member.

Women in Wartime Industry

B. May: I was flattered and pleased when ESMWT invited me to do recruiting of women as well as general administration. The administrative side developed as we went along. The recruiting of women was a major activity in the first part of the war effort.

Morris: Why was it only in the first part?

B. May: We either got them working or not.

Morris: The ones who were going to come to work would when --

B. May: When they first heard of ESMWT.

Morris: In other words, there was a policy decision in Washington that women were going to actively be --

B. May: Not because they were women, but because they were unemployed.

Morris: I see. So, it was in part a measure to relieve unemployment.

B. May: No, it was entirely to sustain war industry. This program was unique in job training because the ESMWT was related to the anticipated shortages in war industry and each of the participating institutions trained only for jobs in war industries assigned to their area, the area in which workers could commute to jobs. We trained in the Berkeley and Los Angeles areas, close to UCLA and Cal Berkeley. The fields in which we trained were different. Aircraft overlapped, but in Los Angeles, we trained for chemical industries like substitutes for rubber and other raw materials. In the north, we trained for shipbuilding and war production carried on near Berkeley.

This is a most satisfactory way to give job training, which developed as we went along. We didn't start off the first day with reliable estimates, but we had to make our own. Soon the War Labor Board got monthly reports of anticipated expansion and the few cases of industries that were dropped, with an estimate of how many people they needed at all levels. It became one of my jobs, as the assistant to Dean O'Brien, to go to War Labor Board meetings in San Francisco. Sam Kagel, who lived in Berkeley and was known as a labor organizer and later a labor negotiator, headed the San Francisco office. The bulk of work concerned blue collar jobs, but war agencies which could use the Labor Board predictions met with him, to go over the sheets and predictions of how many draftsmen, how many jobs in vector analysis, how many people in this or that phase of ship design, it was anticipated that war industry needed.

Predictions varied from hundreds of aircraft designers to thousands of draftsmen to eight industrial glass blowers. We gave industrial glass blowing once, for twelve students and never repeated it -- our smallest project.

Of course, shipbuilding went up from the beginning.

Morris: From zero?

B. May: Yes. But so did diesel engines -- marine and petroleum engineering -- many other war needs as well.

Morris: So that there was a reasonably good idea of how many job openings there would be in these different fields.

B. May: Yes. Of course, estimates are like bread and jelly; they never come out even. But the big difficulty with vocational training in regular schools is that you're training for a diffuse market, for jobs which may or may not exist.

Morris: Did ESMWT have separate things they trained women for, or were the women integrated with the men?

B. May: Integrated in any course that women could qualify for, but there were practically no women engineers at that time. We may have trained a few, but I doubt we kept records by sex, except for the big recruiting effort to put women into junior drafting positions. Both shipbuilding and aircraft require a tremendous amount of detail.

Morris: Yes, pages and pages of drawing.

B. May: Pages and pages and pages. So, I do have that approximate figure in my head. We recruited and trained 3,500 women as draftsmen. At first we had a long list of entrance requirements -- trigonometry, mechanical drawing, solid geometry and so on. Later the pressure was so great that we began asking applicants, "Can you add your bridge score?"

Morris: That's lovely.

B. May: Throughout the war, we did give dexterity and other tests, tried out on me. If I could pass them, probably anybody could because though I'd had baby mathematics through trigonometry, I lacked mechanical drawing and my sense of space relations is poor, Madame Montessori not living in Colusa County.

Morris: While you were involved in this, did you and Professor May ever talk about whether this was likely to be a permanent change in employment patterns and in women in the work force?

B. May: Not that I recall. War needs were our focus. Maybe my friends and I were lucky before the Depression, but if you wanted a career of work and you had job qualifications, it didn't seem then a great handicap to be a woman -- except to convince employers you would stay long enough to bargain for a salary reflecting responsibility.

Some of our trainees kept on with related jobs afterwards, but we didn't ever do any follow-up to see what had happened to them. I have heard by chance about some.

Morris: How about coming in? Were they women who were working in other kinds of jobs, or did you draw housewives?

B. May: For the most part, recent graduates and housewives. And lots and lots of soldiers' wives. Pregnancy was no barrier for

B. May: working either in our office on campus or in drafting rooms. Towards the end of the war, the soldiers' wives, wives of men who were in the South Pacific, were our chief source of women trainees.

Morris: So, they were another group of non-Californians who were here during World War II. Did the university have a child care center to take care of those babies?

B. May: No, and no housing help for them. It never occurred to anybody that that could be considered an employer's or a trainer's responsibility. They often lived in groups. Few of them looked for housing in Berkeley but found quarters as close to the plants as they could. A great many of them lived in Richmond where there was lots of war housing. We just trained them, and got them jobs.

Morris: In other words, they came out here and they got a job, say, at the shipyards in Richmond and then came to you for training?

B. May: No. They wouldn't be hired unless they were trained.

Morris: How long did the training courses take?

B. May: It depended on the field. Professional courses, often a year. Drawing and detailing, or junior drafting, took three or four months -- eight hours a day.

Morris: Were they paid while they were being trained?

B. May: They were not. It wasn't that kind of a deal.

Morris: But the government needed them?

B. May: The government needed them, only when qualified.

Morris: What kind of a financial commitment did --

B. May: None! You passed the course -- you got a job. I don't remember anybody questioning this because it was a different world. You were supposed to get a job in those days on what you could do. It would take more study than I've ever been able to even think about to determine how effective, relatively, that was.

They couldn't repeat our courses time after time after time, and they weren't paid. There were always some dropouts.

B. May: There were some who overestimated their ability or were extra good at taking tests. While the academic training requirements were lowered as the need for workers rose, we never dropped the dexterity and the other tests that would tell both the applicant and the instructor whether the person was likely to succeed at it.

We also did Lockheed's testing for emotional stability. We administered these tests while workers were still being trained for aircraft jobs. If the tests showed that they were emotionally stable, then we sent them to Lockheed, but if they didn't pass, we sent them to Douglas.

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous!

B. May: There were no disasters.

Morris: Did Douglas ever get wind of this?

B. May: Oh, I'm sure they did, but Douglas didn't care whether employees were emotionally stable or not as long as they turned out all those aircraft details.

Morris: Yes. That's remarkable.

B. May: And I've often wondered what really happened at Lockheed. To digress, I went on an invitational ecological trip which was a feature of the Nixon 1972 campaign. (I don't know how I ever got on the invitation list, probably I'm on the enemies list now.) There was a charming woman who'd also been invited, she from the Audubon Society, and who had worked as an executive at Lockheed personnel during the war. I asked her whether they ever made any use of those tests. She was very evasive. I think Lockheed personnel probably put them in a closed file someplace, but that's my cynical view.

Morris: In other words, this was Lockheed's policy. They wanted everybody tested for emotional stability. Whose test did they use?

B. May: A standard test in vogue at that time. I would recognize the name.

Morris: Would the testing have been related to national security?

B. May: No, it was just emotional security, emotional stability, what turns you on and off. It was -- one of these long personality schedules -- thick, thick.

Morris: Inventories.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: What was the federal government's role? Did they fund the program at all?

B. May: They paid all the expenses, for the staff, paper, instruments, demonstration equipment, on a grant-per-unit basis.

Morris: Yes, so that the students didn't get paid, but neither did they have to come up with tuition. You said that the women that you recruited early on were primarily women who had not worked before.

B. May: Yes. They were mainly housewives or new graduates and we appealed to them on a basis of patriotism, in early publicity. I understood that I wounded some friends by saying in a newspaper story, "Don't bake those cookies; get in and work!" We appealed primarily on: "This is a solid thing that needs doing. It's part of the war effort." We didn't say, "You'll be replacing a man," because they weren't. These were jobs that had not existed here before the war.

We trained also at higher engineering and technical levels for which you needed experience. We retrained civil engineers for various jobs, in aircraft particularly. A few women had math enough for vector analysis and other math (pre-computer) jobs.

Morris: The current books being written about women in society refer to World War II as a time when a sizable number of women did go to work for the first time and afterwards did not return to cookie-baking and bridge-playing.

B. May: Yes. We have no figures for World War II on this from our ESMWT. We don't know how many of our trainees turned to similar civilian jobs, but I suspect quite a few did because many liked the work and they made good money.

Morris: And they'd organized their lives to cope with a job and whatever else they did with their lives.

B. May: We didn't think of ESMWT or present it as an opportunity for women. Perhaps if we'd had some professional PR people -- but we weren't attempting to stimulate men and women to become students. We were attempting to train for specific tasks and

B. May: we were also restrained in our promotional efforts by the pattern of financing that was characteristic of war training. We got a separate grant for each course, so it was very hard to justify a PR staff. You couldn't charge it all to any one course and we had trouble enough getting our salaries for administrative staff covered. This took a great deal of budgeteering. Also we were always deciding where to hide some expensive piece of demonstration or teaching equipment over enough related courses to get the bills paid.

Morris: In other words, they didn't allow any percentage for administrative costs.

B. May: There was a percentage for administrative costs, but it didn't cover it or equipment. Equipment we kept saying, "Well, go to Leavenworth later but get it now!" The federal General Accounting Office was heavy over our heads. I remember a marine diesel engine which I think was contributed, but we had to pay the expense of getting it on campus and installed. A diesel engine is very difficult to hide!

This pattern of financing meant that promotion was left to staff talents. We made speeches and we asked for help from anybody we thought could give it to us. For example, one of the generous contributions that turned out to help us not at all was "One Man's Family." "One Man's Family" wrote in to one of their episodes on radio a training course for Claudia, one of the girls in the cast. It was heard every week -- her progress and what she was doing. But they didn't put it in the commercial and hearers thought it was just part of the story.

Morris: They didn't realize this was a real thing they could do?

B. May: Yes. We listened and listened and listened, and asked and asked and asked our students. Only two or three came to us after hours of exposure, whereas if Carleton Morse who wrote "One Man's Family" had required his sponsor to put it in the commercial, we probably would have done much better.

With no money for press relations, we got as much publicity as we could, one way or another. Art Linkletter was the reporter --

Morris: "Queen for a Day?"

B. May: Oh, long before that. He was then an inquiring radio reporter

B. May: on Market Street and I would turn up over there every now and then for an interview by Art. Then, once Art and I gave -- I can't remember whether we both gave blood, on adjacent couches, talking about ESMWT all the time, or whether he interviewed me while I was giving blood.

Morris: That's a very efficient use of everybody's time, I think.

B. May: Anything for publicity. Any time a news picture was taken, I ran up to the front row to at least get ESMWT in the caption. We issued class schedules, circularized engineering clubs and graduates of the university. Of course, the War Labor Board offices all had our stuff. I spoke to many groups and other administrators spoke to many groups, especially if I wrote a speech for them -- which usually inspired them to throw my script away and make a better one off the cuff.

Typescript destruction on a large scale occurred when Dean O'Brien appeared to make a commencement address for a wartime class at Georgia Tech. O'Brien's favorite adjective was "sound." He would say, "Sound ... an engineer must do this and this and this soundly and so reach a sound conclusion." His stenographic help wasn't too good and the speech was typed over in our show, but I didn't see why we should proof it. I thought he could proof it, or --

Morris: Suffer the consequences.

B. May: Or his secretary could proof it. When in Georgia he read the speech, every time he'd said, "sound," the script said, "sober." So, he hastily abandoned preaching to Georgia Tech's "rambling wrecks" and made, he said, his best speech ever.

More worth telling about Dean O'Brien is his carrying ESMWT while at the same time doing vital and usually secret research for the navy. One project on which his ESMWT administrators helped in a fog of bewilderment was to collect vacation pictures of French beaches -- if possible dated and with time of taking -- or with picnic lunchers. After the landing of British and American troops in Normandy, the dean told us he had done a prediction of tides and locations for the invasion. He was invited by the British to fly to England and observe the action. Our pride in our chief rose again to hear he refused this offer on the ground that his work for the project was over and supplies were needed more than a junket for him.

Morris: ESMWT worked on a tight schedule.

B. May: Yes. On training in new ways and coping with the difference between what was thought in Washington and in Berkeley. We all went to Washington a lot.

Morris: During the war?

B. May: Yes. I had a baby priority for airline tickets, the lowest possible grade. I was once bumped in Tucson by a new type of aircraft engine.

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous.

B. May: And once coming home from Chicago, to my embarrassment, I found out after I got off I'd bumped President Sproul, who didn't have a priority.

Just to show you that in spite of my saying that women in my generation were freewheeling, there was prejudice, too. I was waiting one night at O'Hare. I'd found a place to sit down and there was a nice GI next to me; we leaned on each other and went to sleep. Suddenly, I heard someone paging, "Mrs. Bernice May, Mrs. Bernice May." I leaped up in the middle of the night, went up to the transportation desk, stood in line, and finally got there. I said, "I'm Mrs. May. What's the trouble." "Oh," said the ticket-taker, "Susie here has never seen a woman with a priority, so we thought we'd call you."

Morris: That's incredible.

B. May: It happened. And you'd go into the women's room -- the planes landed a great deal, because they couldn't make it to Washington in one jump; you went down for fueling and so on. It always seemed to be in the middle of the night. You'd go into the women's room at the different airfields and all of these poor girls waiting there trying to get to the port to which their GI husbands had been ordered, would straighten up and look at you, and wonder how you got there and hope you were going to be taken off the plane, leaving a seat for them.

A Word with the UnAmerican Activities Committee

B. May: One other sidelight I was reminded of when I looked at Harry Kingman's interview -- I, too, was called as a witness before the UnAmerican Activities Committee!

Morris: Were you! State or federal?

B. May: The state committee, chaired by Senator Hugh Burns. The committee hearing took place after the war, in the wave of McCarthyism which characterized the '50s. The accused man had left the area and I never heard what became of him.

He was charged with spying on the Rad Lab, as well as influencing ESMWT selection of training to meet communist requests. He had worked at Shell Oil when I was working for ESMWT. The committee subpoenaed me, rather than the dean who headed ESMWT and to whom I was assistant, perhaps because the May name was well-known in liberal circles.

I was asked very easy questions to answer. The agency and the university came out smelling like a rose because we had not done what a supposedly communist group had been requesting.

Morris: Which was supposed to be what?

B. May: That we give technical training in the production of artificial rubber. One of the sound precepts behind the planning of the training for war industry at the various universities was that you trained the people in the area for the war industries to be carried on there.

Morris: People who were already living there?

B. May: Yes, the people who were already living there, so that you didn't disrupt the people's lives, but also that you didn't add to the difficulties of war transportation and housing and so on. We could do this because ESMWT was a specialized agency.

But, we had a great pressure from this energetic man who was from the union which was thought to be a communist group. But ESMWT refused to yield to their pressure.

Morris: Because there was not a need for the --

B. May: Because there was no need here. We had the labor board tables and the predictions about the letting of contracts in this area. All of the artificial rubber manufactured in California during the war was made in Los Angeles.

Morris: That's a good story.

Phasing out ESMWT

B. May: One of the objectives, at least of our ESMWT project, was to tie it up right away at the end of war in the Pacific. V-J day was late August [1945] and we closed the agency in September, aiming at either the 27th or 28th or 29th of September. The 27th was Dean O'Brien's birthday; the 28th was in the public domain; and the 29th was my birthday. We were determined that the very latest possible date was going to be September 29.

The grant-per-unit system had its disadvantages but in ending our project promptly, our accounts were current with Washington which simplified matters. We put our files in the custody of the university, paid off the staff, cleared and disposed of equipment, and evacuated our offices on the second floor of California Hall by dark on September 27. Then we had a --

Morris: You had a party, I hope.

B. May: A final party on the 28th. Some were very sad and you're always sad when you bring something that you think has been on the whole a great success to an end. But most of us were proud that we'd done the job and ended it so fast.

Morris: I should think so, yes.

B. May: Many of our people from our large stenographic and typing pool transferred to the regular university staff. Of course, some left Berkeley. One of the advantages of getting out fast, was to get on the employment office lists early. Of course, the engineers who'd done administrative work in organizing and planning courses had all kept their regular university jobs and had worked two jobs during the war.

Morris: Good heavens!

B. May: So, most of us on the administrative staff were glad to be through. I was glad because we'd worked hard and long hours, though we had demonstrated some variations in working conditions which the university later adopted. We started out on the six-day week, but asked the clerical staff if they could maintain production if we went to five days. Of course, they were sure we could. We did! But executive staff had, with Dean O'Brien, Saturday noon and Saturday afternoon to cope with whatever trouble we were in that week. You're bound to be in trouble, you know!

Morris: Working on that tight a schedule, I would think so. Were there things learned in that training which carried over into the post-war years?

B. May: Yes. For example -- from ESMWT and other war training as well -- the techniques of total immersion in one subject. Another was testing for potential skills related to specific tasks rather than IQ, general literacy, et cetera.

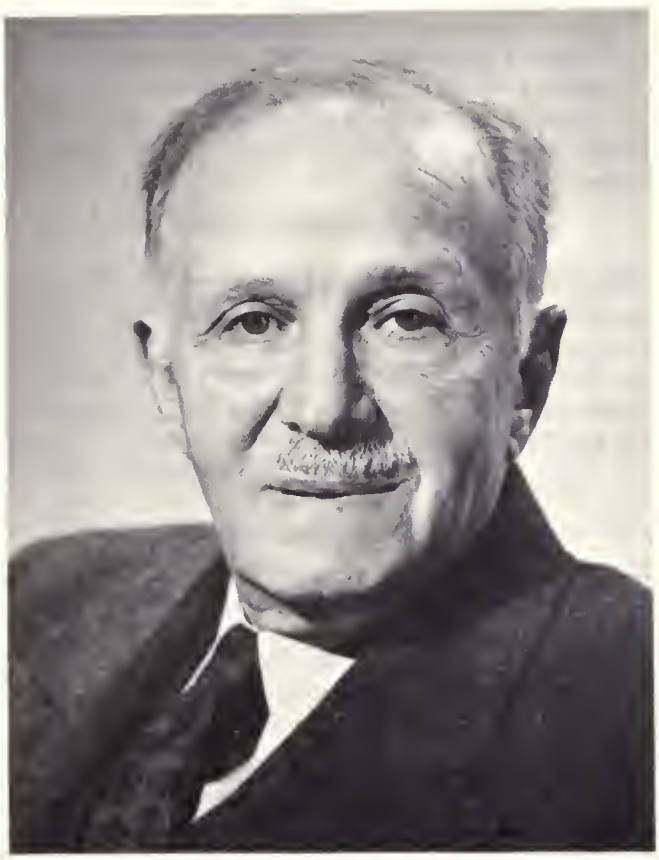
Morris: When ESMWT closed tidily right after the war, did you think at that point of going on with your own career, or did you decide that you'd prefer the community activities?

B. May: I didn't see a professional job coming up. I had a brief trial of life as a housewife and member of the community before working for ESMWT. My parents needed more companionship and travel for pleasure might soon be possible. If a job had looked for me, I might have accepted but meanwhile a vacation seemed in order.

Professor May and Postwar Planning

Morris: Did Professor May and the Bureau of Public Administration have a special mission during the war?

B. May: They did many studies for both federal and state governments. My husband was a member and for a time chairman of the State Council of Defense. But he, with the strong support of their Governor Earl Warren, decided early in the war that two major problems were certainly going to present themselves whenever the war ended. One was how to mitigate the impact of the returning GI on unemployment rates. (The early Depression of



Professor Samuel C. May
ca. 1954

ASUC photograph

B. May: the '20s after World War I had been in part caused by the lack of employment for World War I GIs.) So, directly through the IGS staff or a special research staff -- he surveyed the men as they were going out of the army camps in California where they had trained.

Morris: To the combat zones?

B. May: Yes. They were asked what ideas they had about future plans, how many of them would want to come back to California (many of them had been here, six or eight months) and what would they want to do when they got back. The result has been the basis for the GI Education Bill. Though many men would change their minds, there was to be tremendous impact on California, to hit when war industries were being shut down; and that it was doubtful that industrial postwar planning for conversion could generate enough employment; and that there were many men who said, "I'd really like to go back to school, but what will I do? I won't have the money."

The GI Bill undoubtedly had its dubious educational fringe, because you could have GI for many strange things, but the University of California, other colleges and the law schools absorbed a tremendous number of men and gave many a chance at education, and put them in the job market at varying times. That, I think, was one of the effective pieces of research on postwar planning.

Then, at the same time, a postwar planning committee was set up in Sacramento to appeal to communities, but especially to war industry, to make advance plans for conversion. While again many of these plans turned out to be impractical -- markets had changed -- at least planning aroused management to the possibility of conversion and the need of seeing whatever could be done to keep part of their force on the payroll. The appeal to communities was to plan public works ahead of time that were needed and had been deferred, to be ready to go with peace.

Morris: Was this the Reconstruction and Reemployment Commission that Alexander Heron was the chairman --

B. May: He was a member for a time and worked hard on it. I've forgotten how long my husband was a member of that; Sam was also an earnest speaker on the possibilities of a postwar depression. It shows that the life of a planner is not entirely a happy one because through the years I've been amused and surprised at those who've

B. May: said to me, "You know, your husband was a perceptive student of public affairs, but he certainly missed it when he said there was going to be tremendous unemployment and the possibility of a depression right after the war. It didn't happen." It happened, but not to the extent Sam anticipated -- as possible without plans. He was delighted at the impact of advance discussion.

Morris: In the late '40s --

B. May: Unemployment hit certain communities. Richmond, for example, with its shipbuilding had brought in a tremendous number of laborers who had been recruited, a great many in the South, and given an industrial experience for which there was little carry-over. There were spots like that in California, but we had nothing like the devastation of the projected figures that you got by adding the GIs who were going to come back to the people employed by the industries that were going to have difficulty converting.

Morris: Would you say that the delay and the lessening of the impact of the postwar recession probably was in part the result of Professor May's efforts --

B. May: And many other people's.

Morris: And other people who did accept a need for thinking about it before it hit.

B. May: Yes. The whole concept of just don't sit there and wait for the war to end; have some ideas.

Morris: Yes. This had never been applied to any extent before, had it, on a wide-scale basis?

B. May: No, not as far as I know. I'm sure efforts of this kind must have gone on in other states, but California was in a peculiar position.* We'd had a tremendous amount of in-migration and then we'd had the bulk of the training for the South Pacific and many, many of the men intended to stay and did. California did

---

*See the memoir of Gardiner Johnson in The Bancroft Library for a discussion of postwar estimates of corporations and federal advisory groups gathered by the California legislature.

B. May: a good many things, you see, for them. The veterans' loan program came along fairly early and this is one effort that the League of Women Voters has always supported.

Morris: At what point were you yourself on a citizens' committee for postwar planning? Was this statewide?

B. May: I was on one for Berkeley, the only woman on it!

Morris: Were you?

B. May: The mayor had had a wartime stenographer and so I always thought they thought they were getting Sam, but they were too polite to say, "Go home!"

Morris: [Laughter] You're too modest.

B. May: You see, I'm for infiltrating, not fighting. Berkeley made some plans. I'm sorry to say I can't list them specifically now. Chiefly, as I recall it, deferred maintenance on streets and city property. I can't identify any big changes in the city because Berkeley had then and for a considerable period afterwards a council that avoided taxes, even for pressing city needs.

V VOLUNTEER INTERESTS AND LEADERSHIP: 1945-1959

Social Agency Acquaintances

Morris: How did you become involved in all the organizations in which you took such an active interest?

B. May: People asked me to do things and if I thought it would be interesting, I did. One thing led to another. One serious and rewarding volunteer activity dated back to the extension division, stemming from a program of training for social and later relief workers. Before this, at the request of Martha Chickering, then head of the department of social welfare on campus, we had given courses for employed social workers in private agencies, for which we imported people from eastern schools of social work. We also used the Rosenberg lecturers if we could, Dr. Wayne McMillan was the first, from the University of Chicago. I recall also two distinguished women who came west and did a sister act from the New York School of Social Welfare. One of these was Bertha Reynolds, well-known author and teacher, but the name of the other escapes me. We gave these courses Friday evening through Sunday afternoon in a number of communities -- Santa Barbara, Sacramento, Stockton and so on.

Morris: These were people to work for the state relief agencies?

B. May: This was before the organization of the state and the federal relief. The students came from private charitable organizations but without professional training, chiefly from children's organizations. When they got into federal and later state relief, the state relief program turned to the extension division for training help.

There was a tremendous expansion with staff recruited from all kinds of occupations; then we gave courses at the extension division open only to relief administration employees, courses

B. May: for a kind of credit used in the extension division. Courses labeled in the 600s did not apply towards a university degree, but were evidence of study recognized by the university; graded, with entrance and completion requirements.

Morris: Would this be a certificate program?

B. May: Yes. And enabled many relief staff to be promoted. It covered such things as the law of social welfare, causes of poverty, casework, elements of casework. So, by the time I'd got through with ESMWT, there were a good many professionals in social agencies who knew me.

Morris: Through your courses, yes.

B. May: After the war, there were a series of governor's conferences on social problems, called by Earl Warren. I was asked a number of times to preside over sections. One incident shows the status of women in general was not as pleasant as I had found it personally.

At the first of these, I was asked to report to the entire convention on a section of related discussion groups. A distinguished Negro educator, Seaton Manning, who taught at San Francisco State (as we then called it) and was very well-known, was reporting another section.

I wanted to be sure, whether I was well-prepared or not, to be there on time, so I remember coming on the stage in the Sacramento civic auditorium hungry, but, oh, a good five or ten minutes to spare and my notes in my hand. Already on stage was my black friend, and he looked up and said, "I knew you'd be the next one, Bernice. Women and blacks have to be on time."

Morris: [Laughter] Oh, dear!

B. May: I think it probably was because of my participation in these meetings that I was invited to serve on a number of state organizations related to social welfare and especially to children's problems.

I am sure this is the case with the Citizens Committee on the Adoption of Children in California.

Professor May: Theorists Should Participate
(Date of Interview: April 18, 1974)

Morris: We'd gotten to the point where you'd decided to take up community activities. You mentioned that Professor May urged you to join the League of Women Voters.

B. May: Yes. After our marriage we were talking over breakfast. My husband looked at me and said, "Do you belong to the League of Women Voters?" I said, "Certainly not." He said, "Well, I think you'd better join. I'm going to feel funny belonging without you."

Morris: He was already a member?

B. May: He'd been a member for many years, an associate member. He couldn't vote in the league and he may have had some illusion I was going to give him a surrogate vote. But I did know women who belonged, so I called up and said, "Send me a membership blank." "Oh," they said, "Well, what will you do?" A little later the league invited me to join its state board in charge of making a model plan as to what leagues might do during the pre-war period, for preparedness if war came.

Morris: What particularly about Professor May's ideas and interests about community affairs appealed to you?

B. May: Professor May believed that in the field of public affairs one could not sit and theorize. He thought that if you were doing research or teaching in a field related to government or public health or any other professional activity which involved services to the public, you should participate at least as an observer and, hopefully, as a participant in decision-making from a citizen's viewpoint. He felt that university staff who were going to recommend on legislative decisions should not participate in direct political campaigning for candidates in order that, whoever was elected, the recommendation from the academician should not come with a party stamp already on it.

Morris: I can see that, yes. He had been on the Berkeley City Council himself, hadn't he, back in 1923?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Did he ever tell you what that experience was like?

B. May: He said it was a very useful experience for him because, after all, he'd written the charter revision to enable Berkeley to adopt the city manager form -- the great reform of the '20s -- and it was interesting to see it put into use. He thought the basic fault in the charter was one that a Berkeley citizens group had made a condition of their supporting -- that is, the elected mayor. He considered that, since the council had the decision-making power and the mayor had no added function except that of a presiding officer, it was better to allow the council to choose their own chairman. I think he considered that the major fault of the charter, but this was in 1923. The concept of the responsibility of government towards its citizens has greatly changed and enlarged since then. I believe that he would have agreed with many innovations that were added, especially those that the council on which I served added, not always to the charter, but to the governmental structure for Berkeley.

Morris: As the years went on, yes.

B. May: Social planning is an example, which hadn't been considered as a governmental function at all as early as '23.

The Lost Generation

B. May: We talked before about the withdrawal of many young persons who graduated from universities or had been concerned for peace at the end of World War I. I was one of those who felt that if the League of Nations were rejected by the United States that it would be crippled, that the war to end war, which we'd believed in, had failed, and that the American Congress had betrayed the basic goal held by the American people in entering World War I.

Many of us then decided that we would have nothing to do with this stupidity and that we would do as well as we could to have a pleasant life of our own. Many women of my age then decided to be in no hurry about getting married, which didn't bother us much anyway, because men were plentiful in California and we were sure we could marry any time. "Men are like streetcars. There'll be another one along in a moment or two" was proverbial wisdom then. We also, many of us, decided that we would have no children because we felt that this was a belligerent world in which decisions on a world basis were going to continue to be made by fighting. We did not want to subject our children to that kind of arrangement.

Morris: Was it a large number of you, would you judge, who shared this feeling?

B. May: I would say there was a considerable number because people were always complaining that young people did not join parties and support candidates. Many of us didn't vote unless a special issue had caught our fancy. I'm not sure we were studied, as has been the present generation which rejects the establishment; and we certainly were not active against the establishment.

Morris: Was there an active peace organization during these years?

B. May: If there was, it didn't engage my interest, or my immediate friends' interests. We had no faith in peace talk. You muffed your big chance, we felt. The president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, had taken the league to the people; we had written letters; people had demonstrated. We felt the establishment failure was due to the pride and selfishness of three senators, including Hiram Johnson, who had been elected in California as a great liberal and had led reforms against party corruption in the state. He instituted cross-filing, which was then considered a reform. Later, in the League of Women Voters, I helped repeal it.

I'm sure there were citizens who supported the League of Nations, but, as I say, we'd lost faith and I don't remember ever investigating to find them. I think it's only fair to say when now many older people are very critical of today's young who repudiate and try to degrade and humiliate the establishment, that while our protest didn't take that form, it certainly was uncooperative. We picked up for ourselves Gertrude Stein's dicta, "You're all a lost generation," and rather fancied that, though San Francisco was far from being Paris. This was the era of the big band and we danced a lot.

Morris: Did you read Gertrude Stein?

B. May: Yes, yes. Oh, we read Gertrude Stein and Fitzgerald and the great sportsman -- you know -- Across the River and Into The Trees.

Morris: Hemingway.

B. May: Hemingway and others of that school. We read the current French writers.

Morris: That would be Proust at that point?

B. May: Yes, we all ploughed our way through Proust, either in translation or not, and I must give a cheer to the French department at the University of California. They taught me to speak French with a decided Italian accent. It's always been more useful to me in Italy than in France, but my French was good enough to read Proust in the original. Slowly, slowly!

Morris: Even in English, it's complicated structure.

B. May: Yes, and not at all the kind of clear, French prose we'd been told about, instead being very Jamesian.

I think it's only fair to the young today to say that we in our earlier time abandoned the establishment pretty thoroughly and went around giving parties and dancing. This was the period of the big band and [Paul] Whiteman was at the St. Francis for a long time, not that we could afford to go very often. There was a lovely institution called the tea dance at the big hotels where our men friends could afford to take us because you could dance all Saturday afternoon on one glass of punch or one pot of tea.

But my main point is that I can understand how natural it is for young people to be revolted by the continued use of arms in Asia and elsewhere, to destroy people's lives, farms, and the environment in which they live.

Morris: Yes. That's parallel to the feeling that you and your friends had about war in Europe in the earlier period.

Sierra Club

High Trips in the '30s

B. May: Yes. Then, in thinking about this period, I realized that I didn't retire from a concern for the rest of the world quite as completely as I thought then because in 1932, I joined the Sierra Club. When John Muir and Will Colby and others had founded it in 1897, part of their planning to preserve California's magnificent open space and mountains had been: We must let the people know what's there; we ought to encourage them to go to the mountains and see what they have.

B. May: Since then I'm sure there have been moments when people have regretted that [laughter] when they see how broad the trail from Kearsarge to Rae Lake has become, but this was part of the plan. It was my first real introduction to the problem of preserving open space and environmental quality.

The Sierra Club has changed greatly since then in its concern for impact on the mountains, but in those days we went on the high trip in groups of about a hundred.

Morris: That's a sizable group.

B. May: It was a sizable group, and we took a quantity of horses. It included people of all age groups, and many different businesses or professions. Like most institutions at that time, it was open to any race, but I'm sorry to say that white people and a few orientals made up the trips that I went on.

One of the things that we learned was, hopefully, to be like Indians so that when someone came next year there would be no imprint of the camp. Certainly, anybody following us would have found trampled grass and drowned fire sites, but it really was true. The club, after a year or two, might go back to a site on which we'd camped before and it was a great satisfaction to find that you couldn't locate precisely the limits of the earlier camp.

We had a great deal of what we would now call ecological material discussed around the campfires, interspersed with lots of singing and stunts.

Morris: That's a nice combination. Were there botanists and geologists along to give lectures?

B. May: Yes. Reno Bacigalupi, who later did a great deal of work for the Highway Commission on the use of native plants where they're adapted to highway planting, led botanical side trips, for example.

Morris: Would he be the source of all the flowering oleander that's along the highways?

B. May: I think he's more likely to have been the source of the ceanothus because his theory was that where you could use the native plants, judas trees and ceanothus and fremontia and others, it was a beautiful and useful thing.

B. May: I remember him on my earlier trips as a graduate student in botany at the time who used to give botany walks. And, of course, there was a great deal of rock climbing and mountain climbing and this was fun to do or to watch.

Ansel Adams, the California photographer, went on many of these trips and added often to our concern for the landscape because of his use of trees and stumps and rock formations.

Morris: Did Ansel Adams ever lead a trip?

B. May: Oh my, yes, bringing along all his cameras and equipment. Fortunately, there were pack animals to carry it. [Laughter] He was something to travel with. If there was good scenery, we'd only go a few miles a day, because he took so many pictures -- and he really raced along if there was nothing to photograph.

[After reading the preceding transcipt, Mrs. May recorded these additional comments on June 27, 1974.]

Another fascinating side trip was led by an eminent zoologist whose name I have forgotten, but who took us about explaining what animals we would see if it were only dark and they were out. He was a source of fear and information in snake country because he demonstrated that snakes lack a temperature-regulating mechanism and die if compelled to stay in the sun, or at least a very hot sun, for too long a time.

This loss of life was not wasted because he then cooked rattlesnake stew for dinner, which tasted to me remarkably like veal. I've wondered whether or not the recipe was like the famous English one for rabbit stew -- one horse, one rabbit. Perhaps this was one calf, one rattlesnake. Anyway, I've eaten fresh rattlesnake.

Morris: That must have been quite a startling thing, to come across a dead rattlesnake along the trail.

B. May: Unless someone's killed one recently you don't see them. Our rattlesnakes would not have stayed in the sun without the urging of a circle of Sierra Clubbers with sticks. This was only done in rattlesnake country, going up, oh, perhaps a canyon above Hetch Hetchy, like Jack Mayne.

Many Sierra Club members have long relationships with the university. Francis Farquhar, an eastern convert to the Sierra

B. May: Club, climber, high trip leader, club president, at home served as president of the Friends of The Bancroft Library, and has written widely on the Sierra. His wife, Margery Bridge, is an outstanding rock climber, a gifted photographer, and earlier a Piedmont Avenue neighbor of mine.

Dr. Robert Cutter, another Berkeleyan, well known for his contribution of equipment design and lists of high trip necessities, in the light of which we packed our duffle bags.

Morris: I think he was probably as proud of the snakebite kits and poison oak remedy that he developed for Cutter Laboratories, as any of the more exotic things that they produced.

Madi Bacon [reading from list].

B. May: The one who conducted the boys' chorus and conducted us. When Madi was along, campfire music became distinguished -- Monteverdi and Gluck through Mozart and Bach to Milaud.

Morris: She would lead you in the campfire singing at night? How elegant! Nothing but the best in the Sierra Club.

B. May: We also sang "Seeing My Baby Back Home."

Morris: Did she object to such a frivolous thing?

B. May: No. And old pioneer songs! We had a fancy one year for "Oh, My Name is Samuel Hall" and "When I Was Walking the Streets of Laredo," and work songs -- "The Big Rock Candy Mountains," which is, you know, pie in the sky. "I've Been Working on the Railroad." "Dinah," and so on.

Another pioneer song we sang was "What Was Your Name in the States?"

Morris: That is an authentic early pioneer song.

B. May: It sounds so -- "What was your name in the states? Was it Thompson or Johnson or Bates? Did you murder your wife and flee for your life? What was your name in the states."

Morris: Who else went on some of the trips with you?

B. May: Mary Adams was an old friend from the Berkeley campus, a child welfare worker, and a fine face style mountain climber in the pre-rope and piton days, having climbed her three 14,000 feet peaks.

Morris: Is that a special category?

B. May: A goal self-established by early climbers.

Nora Evans, another Californian, climbed, taught mathematics, and is still making the rounds of the high camps in the upper Yosemite, though she's several years over eighty.

Phil Berry, one of the commissary crew, has become a nationally known conservation advocate and president of the Sierra Club.

Morris: So, he would have been a youngster when he started his Sierra Club activities, like David Brower?

B. May: Yes, younger than Dave.

Richard and Doris Leonard, rock-climber and skier, began going on high trips about the end of the '30s. Doris, after serving on the staff and board of the Nature Conservancy, is now the first woman to be appointed to the board of directors of PG&E.

Morris: That's very interesting that they would select a woman with an ecology background.

B. May: She's a person who will talk and persist to bring about wider understanding.

Morris: There are many ways of looking at conservation, I think. [Reading from list.] Elizabeth Heyneman.

B. May: Elizabeth Heyneman Simon was another Berkeley commissary crew member on high trips I took. Now, with her husband, she leads family trips into the Sierra for the club.

Morris: It's really a lifelong avocation when one signs up.

B. May: Yes. Although I'd happily recall many others my memories of Berkeleyans alone outrun our space. May I end with my sons -- to be more accurate, my two stepsons. Randolph P. May, rock climber of Lost Arrow and many other first ascents, now retired referee, California State Unemployment Board. Doctor Kenneth O. May, rock climber, high tripper, now director of graduate studies in history of mathematics and science at the University of Toronto.

Morris: This gives a nice sense of the variety of people who partook.

[Interview of April 18, 1974 resumed.]

B. May: Then, to drop a name that probably typifies for many people the most persistent advocate for public concern for and public protection of the natural environment all over the world, Dave Brower.

Morris: I was wondering if he was active then.

B. May: On the first Sierra Club trip I ever went on, he was probably fourteen or fifteen and a rock climber. He was already lecturing the rest of us about trail safety and signing up. His very distinguished career has been a great satisfaction to watch and to see him and his wife, Ann, also a Sierra Club member, has been a great pleasure from time to time.

We compromising political types are more likely to think, "Well, let's take a half loaf if we can get it," but Dave thinks if we only shout long and loud and push hard enough, we'll get the whole loaf.

Morris: That's an interesting contrast. Did he come along with his parents?

B. May: Oh, no. He was old and strong enough to come. There was no discrimination on age. On that first trip, there was also a charming old Scotsman named Lun Renny who was eighty years old and had been on high trips most of his life.

Morris: I'm most curious -- what did you wear rock climbing?

B. May: Well, I didn't rock climb because, unfortunately, I have trouble going down very steep heights. But the rock climbers, according to the character of the rock, had special shoes. Otherwise, they wore just what the rest of us wore for walking. Through the years they developed more and more equipment. At first, they used ropes only occasionally, chiefly for safety, and later they developed the rope techniques. They would wear appropriate boots or rubber-soled shoes, whatever suited the terrain.

Morris: Was there concern in some of those campfire discussions that there might be too many people coming into the mountains?

B. May: Not at that time because so very few people went. There was some concern on the part of the park people, though we always went in the high country and didn't stay in Yosemite Park. But I think some of the park people realized that this was the

B. May: beginning of crowding and an encouragement to more and more use of the park high country. While we were sometimes in the national forests, we were usually in the upper Yosemite, the upper Kings, and so on.

Before I stopped being able to go so frequently, I walked the John Muir Trail from its Tioga end to Mt. Whitney and I'm sorry I've never been able to do all of it.

Morris: That's quite an accomplishment to do that much.

B. May: Oh, it was fun and beautiful, though not always comfortable. I went on one fourteen-day vacation of which it rained twelve days. [Laughter] But the most interesting single trip I ever took from the point of view of learning something about the Sierra and its position in American geography was one year when we walked across the Sierra. We went up the west side -- verdant trees, bubbling streams, not easy, but comparatively gentle slopes. We walked across the crest and then down the other side into the sand and the cactus.

Morris: Looking out over the Nevada desert.

B. May: Looking out over the Nevada desert.

Morris: Incredible.

B. May: And the abrupt change in the terrain, the soil, the growth, was tremendous. That, I think, was the most interesting single trip for getting a comprehensive view of what we had to preserve.

Since then, as I'm sure you know, the Sierra Club has greatly reduced the size of its trips. It no longer takes over twenty-five, I understand, on the kind of trips we went on with a hundred or so members. The club recently gave to the National Park Service all of the land which it privately owned, which was mostly in Yosemite.

Morris: I didn't realize that the Sierra Club itself had held land.

B. May: Yes. We owned a very attrative site near the Merced River on the floor of the valley, on which a chapel and meeting room had been built. Then a large block of land in Tuolomne Meadows, including the famous soda springs; that's a matter of, I think, several thousand acres. Then there are other bits scattered around. Since the Sierra Club has been firmly opposing any private enclaves in any national park, it has given that land to the Park Service.

SIERRA CLUB OUTINGS
ca. 1938

The Minarets

Frozen Lake near Silver Pass

Mono Creek

Hutchinson Meadow

Morris: Was there any conflict over living up to its principles that way?

B. May: Well, I wasn't on the board of directors, so I don't know. But I really approve the decision, though I'm sure many Sierra Club members will miss being able to give their name and camp in the beautiful Tuolomne Meadows. There is a lodge there which we all enjoyed and then a very considerable area down the Tuolomne River.

Environmental Issues

Morris: When you were active in the hiking tours, was there also Sierra Club legislative activity?

B. May: Yes. Through the years, the club supported or opposed legislation, though with the increasing threat to open space, rivers, animals, flowers and trees, the club has greatly expanded their legislative program and has been effective at times and not at others. Its concern has deepened as the threat has deepened. The earlier efforts, as I recall them, were largely against blasting roads over the Sierra crest -- that is, for our California groups. But now the Sierra Club is a national organization and it is active --

Morris: The whole range of environmental issues.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Would they have opposed things like the campaign to expand Highway 40 from a two-lane road to a freeway over the top, which went on for some years?

B. May: I think that the club opposed not the roads from Tahoe over to Nevada, because this seems a logical break in the mountain ranges and it's a long way East if you don't have at least one road over the mountains. I don't remember specifically whether they did or not. I remember particularly the opposition to proposed roads that would cross in the area of Kings Canyon or Mineral King.

Morris: Further south where it is still largely wilderness.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: So that when you became super active in community affairs, you

Morris: already had an understanding of the environmental point of view.

B. May: Yes. And that has been a concern through the rest of my life and one that I consider fundamental, not simply from the point of view of preserving the extraordinarily beautiful scenic portions of the mountains and the wild animals and birds that live there, but also from the point of view of looking at land use planning in terms of the resources of a given area and what kind of activity it's suited for and how many people, cows, bears, deer, raccoons, or whatever, it can support.

Not only do I owe the Sierra Club many good times but I realize that the Sierra Club concern for the environment did provide me with a concept which I think is threatening but hopeful. If we act sanely -- I hope the day will come when we can follow the Friends of the Earth to take in other countries, I think it's one of the most hopeful approaches for the United States to other countries.

Morris: In terms of human relations as well as in terms of man's relationship with nature.

B. May: I think it would greatly improve our human relations if we stopped destroying jungles.

Morris: Yes, I think you're right. When did you become aware of environmental issues on the urban scene?

B. May: I would say not until later, partly because here in the Bay Area, our smog developed later than Los Angeles, for example. If you went to Los Angeles at all frequently in the war years of the '40s, you were appalled by what was happening there. But this then seemed a community problem. I think we -- I, at least -- recognized it as a regional problem only after World War II.

Morris: Yes. That's a marvelous picture of the Sierra Club and what it meant to you and what the experience was like then. So, your membership and interest in the Sierra Club continued on through the '40s and the --

B. May: I'm a life member.

Morris: I'm delighted to have this, because, as you probably know, the Sierra Club is also developing its own archives and they'll be delighted with your volunteer recollections.

B. May: Yes. [Laughter] Now where are we?

Women's Attitudes

Morris: What I'd like to ask you is: when you wound up the war training program and decided to go into things like the League of Women Voters and the United Crusade, did this make any major changes in your domestic arrangements, in how you ran your household?

B. May: Well, yes. While I was working on campus, I had a student who shopped and prepared vegetables or whatever as make-ready for dinner. I should have prefaced that by saying that she washed the dishes from the night before. But after I gave up gainful employment, I did my cooking and most of the housework myself.

Morris: You mentioned that when you got involved in community activities, you found some differences in the way they functioned and the way your office had functioned.

B. May: I think this is true. But going back for a minute to the point about missing help in the home, I didn't because there were just my husband and myself and we were glad to be through with having dinner at home every night because my helper would have peeled the potatoes. [Laughter] Although I liked to cook and my husband liked what I cooked.

Morris: That's nice.

B. May: So, this was easy. But I think many women who work, even with small families, make the mistake of not giving themselves enough support at home in whatever form they need to carry on the responsibilities of the jobs they are doing.

Morris: Because their salaries didn't permit it, or because they didn't think that they were entitled to it?

B. May: I don't know why. I've never been able to understand why. An ambitious man on a low salary doesn't spot-clean his suit; he sends it to the dry cleaner. A woman on a low salary tries to get along on it. Now, I'm not saying this in regard to the person who's living on the minimum wage. I'm talking about the person who has a job which pays her a fairly adequate salary. I won't quote any figures.

Morris: [Laughter] They don't stay the same very long.

B. May: They don't stay the same. For what I considered handsome compensation that ESMWT paid me out of those federal funds, you couldn't now hire a stenographer.

Morris: Yes, you're right.

B. May: But I think that one of the small tactical mistakes that women who really want promotion make is that they don't give themselves the small helps in the day-to-day routine that men have always either expected from their wives or mothers or to pay for.

Morris: Yes. Do you think this affects the attitudes of a woman in an office, or her expectations for advancement?

B. May: I think it affects her performance. If she comes in after having gotten up early to do the family washing, she's not likely to be just what you'd call real sharp on the job.

Morris: They're still thinking about the washing rather than thinking about whatever needs attention in the office.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: That's an interesting point.

B. May: Now, what was your next question?

Morris: My next question is related to this. What differences did you find in the way community activities function from the way an office does?

B. May: It may be an entirely different situation or in other cases very like professional work. I think many organizations that do greatly needed work which keeps hospitals and rehab organizations like Easter Seal running, have set up a plan which covers money-raising, publicity, and sale of this and that every year, and so follow a procedure which they perhaps review at intervals, or perhaps they don't review it at all.

But the kind of volunteer organizations in which I felt myself to be most useful were set up like the League of Women Voters or like the Citizens' Committee on Adoptions in California, in which the members carry on studies, investigations on larger or smaller scale and, in the end, making recommendations either to a member constituency, as in the league, or as in the case of the committee on adoptions, recommendations to the public and to members of the legislature for social change. Here procedures

B. May: and viewpoints are reviewed and changed as need arises and the pattern of organization is usually much like that of a professional agency.

Citizens' Committee on Adoptions

Morris: You were going to tell me about the effort to get the Rosenberg grant to support that first study that the adoptions committee did.

B. May: Yes. It was, I suppose, the usual competition for grants-in-aid. Rosenberg gave us a short grant and then we kept coming back for more. The life of that committee was from 1949 to 1964. After many of our proposals had been adopted, we had made reports which got a good deal of national recognition; we had a good staff, and we didn't wish to stop. This was, of course, a matter of concern for the Rosenberg directors, because they follow the plan of many foundations and give you seed money. But the committee on adoptions didn't really wish to go out and raise money.

Morris: How did it happen the committee went to the Rosenberg Foundation for the money instead of going to the state legislature or the governor's office?

B. May: Neither the governor's office nor the legislature would have given us the money, particularly not the legislature that was and still is strongly under the influence of attorneys and their organization. The independent adoption, to which we were trying to add safeguards, though many of us would have liked to have wiped it out completely with the exception of adoption by close relatives, was the source of very high incomes for a very small group of attorneys, particularly in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Bits of information stick in your head. During the committee's life, the price for a Jewish child in Los Angeles ranged between five hundred and a thousand dollars, paid to the attorney, who didn't keep all of it, probably. He usually paid the mother's hospital expenses and perhaps some money to get her started in life again.

Morris: This is separate from court fees and legal documentation?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: What was the issue particularly that -- ?

B. May: The black market in babies was the most spectacular.

Morris: Were there an exceptional number of adoptions?

B. May: Yes. The agency adoption procedure at that time, we thought, wasn't as good as it should be either, so that we reviewed the whole field. But it was a matter of concern that there was a great deal of competition for children born in the Jewish faith, especially in Los Angeles -- I can't explain that -- and Protestant children, particularly if they were blond and blue-eyed.

Morris: And healthy and all that.

B. May: And healthy, hopefully. This was another criticism of the independent adoption, that the child was given to the adopting parents right from the hospital and there really hadn't been time to observe the child. The adoption agencies were required to keep them long enough to be sure the infant was all right.

Now, I've found some of our voluminous reports and our study reports, and I'd like to, if they aren't too voluminous, have those filed with our final report.*

Morris: Oh, that would be marvelous because all I have seen of that is the summary in the Rosenberg annual report and that doesn't have the specifics.

B. May: Yes. The committee covered a great variety of experience. We did have judges and I think we had one attorney who was very opposed to the abuses of the independent adoption, and there were representatives of adoption agencies and the state welfare. Miss Lucile Kennedy, who was the head of the child welfare division in the state department at that time, represented the state.

We met monthly for three or four years and we had an excellent staff, usually two or three persons who followed up investigations and wrote reports for our approval and so on.

Morris: Were they on loan to the committee from a state department?

B. May: No. We hired them, often from out of state. This was to be a citizen and not an official pronouncement.

---

*These and other printed materials were deposited in the Institute of Governmental Studies library for greater accessibility. Ed.

Morris: Did you go out and visit some of the agencies as members of the committee?

B. May: Some of us did, but we didn't make field trips en masse. It was hard enough for the judges to get to our meetings. Other members did visit courts, hospitals, and adoption agencies, like Children's Home Society.

Morris: How did the judges feel about the court being studied by a citizens' committee?

B. May: Those of them who joined the citzens' committee, of course, were all for it because they had seen abuses. I'm not at all sure that the opponents were represented on the committee, though there were varying degrees, of course, of willingness to require that the majority of adoptions should be carried on under, first, the investigation of a social agency under firm regulations and, then, with the approval or disapproval of the court.

It would be interesting, if one had time to study everything, to go back and see what really was the result, because we set up a great many precautions which are, I believe, still in the law, but are perhaps not needed today with the change in social conditions, with the tendency of unmarried mothers to keep their babies, with the passage of the laws legalizing abortion, and with the current change in social attitudes. The problem in adoptions today is primarily the adoption of what we used to call the hard-to-place child -- the handicapped, the child of mixed race or religion -- and the sheer volume of placements has dropped off. But cases of neglected or abused children are uncreasing.

Morris: This is what I understand. One question on procedure -- did you select your own chairman?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Who was that? Did that stay the same throughout?

B. May: Wesley G. La Fever of Oakland was our chairman for the first year or two, followed by Judge Ben Koenig of Los Angeles who served until about 1959 when he resigned and was succeeded by Frank H. Sloss.

Morris: Was the committee by in large of the same opinion, or were there pros and cons?

B. May: No, there were pros and cons, because there's, I'm sure, something to be said on both sides. I've spoken bitterly about attorneys, and the doctors were in on independent adoptions, too. There was opposition, as I recall it, from doctors on the ground that a doctor with a large family practice could select a baby from those that were placeable for adoptions from his practice and give it to someone else in his practice. This would mean greater privacy and, they felt, as much protection.

There was a great deal of discussion in the committee on what was then the theory of the agencies, and I think it's a good one, on matching, under which you tried to find a child at an agency whose family background, whose intellectual heritage, would be similar to that of the adopting parents. The agencies, many of my friends felt, were prejudiced against the older couple who wanted to adopt a child.

The experience of the agencies and, as a matter of fact, the experience of the people I knew who'd adopted children favored younger parents. But there was great discussion on that.

Morris: What about the question of confidentiality in these adoptions arranged between two families within one doctor's caseload?

B. May: We felt that was not sufficiently protected, because in the court procedure for independent adoptions, the mother saw the whole petition and knew the name of the person who had her child. She very frequently came back and tried to claim the child, or, not perhaps as frequently, but from time to time, came back and wanted more money.

Morris: Even when there'd been a court decision on it?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: The adoptions being arranged privately by doctors and attorneys did go through court?

B. May: Oh, yes. But this didn't have legal protection of privacy. You see, in an agency adoption, the mother relinquishes her child to the agency and then the agency places the child and carries on the court procedure. The mother, unless she does an unusual amount of detective work, can't find out to whom her child goes. Adoption agencies care for the child for a while to make sure about its health, physical and mental, and also to

B. May: give the mother time to change her mind if she wants to.

Morris: Did this happen in any number of cases?

B. May: Yes, I think that it did from time to time. Agency statistics would show that.

[After reading the preceding transcript, Mrs. May recorded this additional material on June 27, 1974.]

Origins and Membership

Morris: What was the origin of the statewide committee on adoption?

B. May: The push for this committee came from citizen concern centered around the child in need of a home. The committee formed itself in accordance with the seldom-used democratic principle that citizens of a state or other governmental unit have just as much right as the governmental unit itself to look at procedures, to investigage what's being done, to make up their minds as to whether it's being done justly or effectively, and to then either support or oppose. The committee was self-appointed.

Morris: In other words, a true ad hoc committee?

B. May: It began officially with a planning committee of citizens interested in various forms of adoption and guardianship. This committee thought about what was needed and decided, first, to involve a large number of citizens to investigate on a statewide basis and to make recommendations. Second, to form a series of county committees to observe procedures in local courts, adoption agencies, probation departments, and to see what happened, how far the law was disregarded or followed in practice. They were also to see what a citizens' investigation not related to any governmental department or dominated by professional staff would find in the field. We ended with less than five percent of our membership professional social workers.

Morris: That's a very interesting comment right there. Who were the people who put together the planning committee? Where did the idea start that this was something that the citizens should look into?

B. May: It started, as I said, with a group of people who thought something should be done in light of the rapidly increasing adoptions in California, which had gone in ten years from a small number -- maybe 600 -- to over 5,000 at the end of the ten years.

Morris: Good heavens! This would be the ten years including the Second World War?

B. May: 1939 to 1949 -- years in which there were many children, some abandoned, some not, who needed care.

Morris: Were you on the planning committee?

B. May: No. I was on the state committee, the committee to do the overall investigation, hire staff, report, lobby for legislation if needed, but primarily to get the people of California to understand the size of the problem, the differences in the protection offered by independent and agency adoptions, and the many children who slipped between both. For example, we looked at the number of children just stored in children's institutions. They'd been placed in orphanages and there many of them stayed, when they could have been happier in, and have contributed to, a family of their own.

By the time the first three-year study, financed by the Rosenberg and Columbia foundations, had been completed, we had some 650 people working in these two layers of committees.

Morris: That's a really impressive number.

B. May: Of course, their contributions and interest varied. We had a state committee of fifty-five and also some 590 citizens, plus or minus, in twelve local committees in the counties most affected by the need to take care of the homeless child and to offer services to adopting parents as well as natural parents. These included such counties as Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Francisco, and a sprinkling of smaller ones like Kern.

Morris: That's an interesting cross section.

B. May: In addition, six more counties sent representatives to the state committee and hopefully carried back the gist of the sessions.

Some of my colleagues on the state committee (and the whole committee is too numerous to name here) were Dr. James V. Campbell of Oakland, Ben C. Duniway --

Morris: He's a judge now, isn't he?

B. May: Yes. Mrs. Hubert Wyckoff.

Morris: Had you known her prior to this adoption committee?

B. May: Yes. She is the beautiful daughter of my old boss. Dr. Leon J. Richardson. She, like me, was changing from the frivolous young person of the '20s into the volunteer of the '50s.

Morris: Was she the chairman?

B. May: No. Dr. Donald G. Toffeffson, Martin I. Dinkelspiel, Judge Albert C. Wollenberg --

Morris: He'd been in the legislature at the beginning of this period.

B. May: Yes. Assemblyman Ralph M. Brown, Senator Edward J. Regan --

Morris: I'm fascinated. Who put this committee together?

B. May: [Laughter] As soon as there were enough of us on the state committee we had a nominating committee. Successive groups of members were voted in, each voting for the next group.

Morris: I see. It's sort of like an honorary society.

B. May: Not exactly, but self-selected. We wanted everybody who came aboard to be concerned about the homeless child. We used as a test the statement that every child has the right to a home of his own. The committee members agreed on the goal, but as we soon found, we disagreed in many ways over the means, the best means, of achieving it.

Finally, because the committee sounds, in the names I've given you, almost exclusively male, I'd like to mention Mrs. Kendall Frost, active as a board member of adoption agencies, and Miss Lucile Kennedy who, for a long time, headed the Child Welfare Division of the then State Social Welfare Department.

The Disappearing Orphanages

Morris: You mentioned that there were a number of orphanages at that point. Were these run by the counties?

B. May: No, by private institutions. There were Catholic, Jewish, Methodist orphanages. One which has made an interesting adaptation to changing social conditions is Fred Finch Home in East Oakland, which had started as an orphanage and which, as opportunities arose for their children, placed them in homes. Fred Finch today serves the adolescent who, because of his experience or his mental and emotional capacity, has not been able to adapt to family living and is doing better living in small groups of peers.

Morris: So, it's for teenage young people with difficulties in school and family.

B. May: Primarily for teenagers, many not free for adoption. Their parents hope to be able to care for them again when their crisis is over.

Morris: And the orphanage as an institution has almost disappeared from the American scene.

B. May: Yes. The replacement of institutional care is one of the achievements of the extension and improvement of adoptive services, though these by no means solve all the troubles.

Morris: Are you going to tell me about foster homes?

B. May: No, because foster homes represent another problem, though in the 1950s much of their work was back-up for adoption services. A child could be placed in a foster home for observation and loving care while a decision was being made as to whether or not he was physically and mentally equipped to be adopted.

Morris: So that foster homes did already exist in addition to orphanages?

B. May: Yes. My mother, in the 1860s, was placed by her working mother in a foster home in San Francisco, out on Mission Street.

Morris: That sounds almost like the kind of arrangement a working mother would make for her infant even today.

B. May: Yes. My grandmother was not able to manage the high rent in San Francisco and have her baby with her downtown. Of course, mass transit didn't exist.

We'll file with this report a copy of our three-year study.

Morris: I've read a summary of it in a Rosenberg Foundation annual report and I'd very much like to read the whole final report.

B. May: Good. It is so concise it's difficult to summarize. The chief problems that we studied in the first three years concerned abandoned children, childless couples, unwed mothers -- I think that "unwed" adds a Victorian note -- orphaned children, natural parents, and the social services needed by these groups.

There were many special recommendations in the report, but its main tenor was that sound family and child welfare service, including adoption services in public and private agencies, should be expanded as rapidly as could be done while maintaining accepted standards. The emphasis was on help to keep children in their own homes first and, with the failure of their parental home, help to provide an adoptive home that would be happy and permanent.

Morris: Were there discussions about what the social attitude was toward adoption in those days?

B. May: We talked about that chiefly in regard to privacy. Adopting parents were usually advised to be frank about the adoption with the child and with their friends, but they were not always able to encompass this.

Morris: I was wondering if there was any resistance to the idea of adoption earlier, if this was why the orphanages had increased so in the number of kids they were caring for.

B. May: No. I think that those orphanages and other agencies that resisted adoption were quite naturally thinking of the size of their institutions and buildings. They'd served children, they felt, well in the past and were not ready for change. Some institutions were reluctant to give up children of their faith unless assured that the faith of the natural parents would be continued by the adopting parents. But, on the whole, I think this was the resistance of any going organization to a change which greatly lessens or eliminates the services they have been at such pains to develop. We see this in today's adoption agencies when the requests for adoption now have greatly lessened.

Foundation Grants

Morris: So, the committee had been functioning for two or three years. At what point did you decide that you needed some money?

B. May: Right from the beginning! We were clear that while we didn't need professional help, we needed some of that filthy lucre because otherwise how would people ever hear about the study, what the public reaction was, what added shove was needed? So, in our first days of organization, we began talking to foundations of one sort or another.

Morris: Executives for the Columbia Foundation were Marjorie Elkus and the Rosenberg Leslie Ganyard in those days. Did those ladies know that your committee existed, or did you send a delegation to talk with them?

B. May: I'm sure that they both had heard, because to fund managers as well as social workers this was a surprising effort. The foundations heard a great deal about it immediately because we had a good finance committee on which were serving many of the men and women who had represented organizations or families which had made contributions to the foundations or served on their decision-making boards.

Morris: The adoptions committee set up its own finance committee?

B. May: Of course!

Morris: What a very able bunch!

B. May: Nobody else was going to do it! I'm looking in this report to recall who the finance committee were [looking through report], but they seem to have sought privacy. Not wishing to be asked to do this again.

Morris: Was it any big deal in those days to get a foundation grant?

B. May: Yes, it was difficult because the competition for grants was great and the boards of both foundations were deeply concerned about making the best use of their funds every year.

As I had observed earlier in regard to grants for adult education the short grant for serious citizen projects is often counter-productive. California is dotted with foundation approved starts never given time to take root in community life

B. May: before the seed money ran out -- and a new dream begins a year or so later with a new year's budget.

There was the usual competition for grants-in-aid. Rosenberg gave us a short grant and we kept coming back for money.

Morris: Did the committee on adoptions at some point become a part of or develop a working relationship with the Governor's Committee on Children and Youth? You were parallel?

B. May: I'm sure we spoke to them nicely when we saw them, but we felt strongly that adoption needed concentrated attention in regard to many legal and personal problems and that it would not be profitable to mix up the two committees. As I recall it, the governor's committee was largely social workers and other pros related to the first White House Conference and so to delinquency.

Morris: In 1941 it did a study preliminary to the White House Conference. It began earlier as a committee on youth in wartime. It did a study on transient youth and probably zeroed in on adolescents rather than the little tinies, as the adoptions committee would.

Shelter Care, Guardianship, and Other Concerns

B. May: Yes, though we were interested in adoption as a solution for the older child also, but our first concern was the number of infants that needed care then.

Although requests for placements through adoptions has dropped today, the cases of neglected and abused children are increasing and may indicate a renewed need for proper guardianship or adoption.

You asked whether we selected our own chairman. We did indeed. We had, during the long, total life of the committee, three chairmen; first, Wesley G. La Fever, of Oakland, who was our chairman for the first year or two, followed by Judge Ben Koenig, of Los Angeles, who served until about 1959 when he resigned and was succeeded by Frank H. Sloss.

Morris: He's also had a long history in the good and welfare of the Bay Area, hasn't he?

B. May: Yes. At the time of Mr. Sloss' coming into the committee, we had, under Ben Koenig, decided that we needed to do another statewide roundup report. We discontinued the county committees and, in fact, for technical pruposes, legal purposes, that I don't now recall, organized out of our earlier committee with some new recruits a new committee entitled California Citizens Adoption Committee, Inc., which Mr. Sloss chaired ably.

Morris: Mr. Sloss is an attorney. He probably thought it was a tidier thing to be incorporated. [Laughter]

B. May: What we did in this committee in the remaining two or three years of our life was to supervise and publish, again with Rosenberg help and with the advice and assistance of Mrs. Jackson Chance, still the executive manager of the foundation, a two-year report on serving children in need of adoption, in which many of the basic recommendations of the earlier committee were repeated.

One problem which we had seen early in our study was emphasized in the second report and that is the tendency of local judges, detention officers, and other local officials to refer the child who needs service only because he has no home to a detention institution rather than to an institution which would provide shelter and care. The committee felt this was a poor practice and that the probation departments should join us in recommending a change. The older child with no prior contact with correctional difficulties often got his first start on the way to being a juvenile delinquent by being kept within juvenile hall for a matter of months if he were an abandoned child, in an institution of mixed ages and very mixed experience of the children there.

Morris: Was this because by this time the orphanages had begun to either close down or convert to other kinds of activities?

B. May: No, they had never temporary shelter to any extent. Some communities had -- Berkeley, with all its faults, had a fine building down on Sixth Street, now being used for other purposes, that had been given primarily to afford safe shelter for any child in need of temporary care.

Morris: How far back did that go? Have you any recollection?

B. May: [Pauses to think.] Judging by the architecture, I would say it went back to the '20s. We could find out by calling the Family Service Agency in Berkeley. For many years they administered a program of temporary shelter as part of the arrangement by

B. May: which they occupied the building, with a permanent mother, who lived there. But through the years, fewer and fewer children needed temporary shelter.

Morris: It's curious how the needs change and then reappear again.

B. May: We thought the needs had not changed, except in numbers and that the probation departments grabbed the children.

Morris: They didn't use the available community facilities?

B. May: That they didn't use the facilities and that in many cases judges in county courts had not been converted to this new viewpoint and continued, because it seemed easy and legal, to send children to juvenile hall.

Morris: It was this second report reflecting your ten years experience and then the two years restudy that received a Marshall Field Award?

B. May: No, it was the first report which got great kudos. The second was also well received, but at that time, though we were trying to maintain it, we were already feeling a certain diminution of public interest.

After the publication of the report on "Serving Children in Need of Adoption," we began to consider that our period of greatest usefulness was over. We also at that time published in a less attractive but more economical form a series of reports by committees of the state committee itself. Those covered services to unmarried mothers; in two sections, guardianship laws and procedures; and another on freeing children from parental custody and control.

Morris: Freeing children from parental custody and control? That was a novel idea, wasn't it?

B. May: Guardianship was an old tool, but it hadn't, we thought, been used enough to free the child from parents who were not caring for him and yet wouldn't give him up for adoption. This often was an impediment for the child in an orphanage because they'd lost track of the parent, or the parent could be located but refused to do anything about adoption, but sometimes was willing to yield guardianship.

Morris: That's interesting. Which of these subcommittees, or working committees, did you work on?

Changing Public Attitudes

B. May: Not on an investigating committee. I plugged away with others on changing public attitudes and interest, and worked with the Alameda County committee as liaison from the state committee. In Alameda County, we survived, I think, longer than many county committees because we had a good and cooperative Alameda County adoption agency and also much media and citizen support.

Morris: With Charles Schottland involved in the work of the committee and Lucile Kennedy, did that make a difference in operations of the state departments that had to do with children -- did you feel that they accepted the recommendations the committee made and adopted them?

B. May: Charles was long gone to Washington, but certainly Miss Kennedy had great influence in the legislature and with agencies, both private and public. Mr. Schottland served primarily on the planning committee.

Morris: Did your changing public attitudes function involve talking to the legislators?

B. May: No. I meant changing public attitudes in the communities, because our theory was, and I still think it's a good one, that if you're to bridge effectively the gap between what the law sets down and what actually occurs at the local level, you need a watchful and informed citizenry. This was where we were shoving. The state committee, when we could agree as to what legislative change we wanted, carried the legislative appearances.

Morris: You said "when you could agree." Were there differences of opinion in the committee?

B. May: Yes, because, as I think we said earlier, the committee represented no one who was opposed to the care of the homeless child, but as to the best means of carrying this out, there was a great deal of disagreement.

In our first discussion I've reported on the opposition of doctors and attorneys to the private adoption, to the agency adoption. But there were many people living in this and other communities who felt that adoption agencies investigated too much, that they provided an element of privacy which wasn't really needed, and that it was much simpler if you saw a nice baby and his parents would give him to you to just go ahead and

B. May: adopt without going through tests and study. These people were always muttering about red tape. When there were some twenty applications for every infant, agencies felt compelled to do the best investigations that they could because they were representing the child and should pick the very best home they could find for him. I'm sure that this often made prospective parents feel that they were being most rigidly inspected.

Morris: Was there any pressure within the committee to continue its existence after you reached this point that you described, where you felt your primary mission was over?

B. May: We all felt a real regret at ending what had become for all of us who survived a major allocation of time and interest. But we also felt and some of our families felt that they'd been hearing about adoptions for quite a while.

Morris: So, you just declared the committee at an end?

B. May: Yes. We announced that we'd won.

Morris: And everybody went home, good.

B. May: After the appearance of our final reports.

Morris: That was '59, wasn't it? Just at the same time that you were taking on the city council?

B. May: Yes. It overlapped for a time with my council service. But in those days we thought of a councilman's job as a part-time one. It finally seemed to me to be becoming verbose full-time, but not at the beginning.

Morris: Well, I think that is marvelous to have that additional background on that adoptions committee.

B. May: Good. When we get to this again, we will probably be cutting out things.

Morris: I think it's almost all new material. When we get a transcipt, I'll take a look and if there's any that can be combined, I will.

B. May: I'm really embarrassed that when we began I thought first of those children in the black market, which was a center of a good deal of our effort, which has disappeared pretty largely but may be recurring today. But I neglected this unusual citizen push in

B. May: a technical and legal field to interpret the law and to formulate local and state policy that would strengthen and extend services, first to the child, but next to natural and adopting parents.

Morris: Did you get any feedback from other states, either that they wanted your reports or that they took up a similar interest?

B. May: The reports were very widely criculated. We were always running out of them. But since I then went into politics and was no longer meeting at such frequent intervals with people from child agencies or attending conferences on the care of the child away from his home, I can't answer that of my own knowledge. I hope we had some lasting influence.

One area in which the committee worked was exchange between states of children, usually children difficult to place. For example, in cases of racial minorities, the practice was established between counties and states of letting other agencies in an area, in which hopefully there would be prospective parents, know of a child available but not readily placeable in his own community.

Morris: That was primarily an information exchange?

B. May: Yes and often led to the adoption of a child.

Morris: I have one last question. You mentioned that child abuse, the neglected and abused child, was now a new concern.

B. May: Yes. The child who is beaten, the child who is not fed or clothed in a healthful way. But many, many more cases come up nowadays of actual physical abuse. These are difficult and present under some circumstances the possibility of a child, a small infant, in need of care being in a detention home rather than in a home, foster or otherwise, whose skills are centered on the very young child in trouble.

Morris: You're thinking that possibly there's a need for new study of this?

B. May: I think (but I don't know that it hasn't been done because I haven't been following the literature) that there is need for concern about conditions. I'm judging primarily by newspaper accounts. A great handicap at this time is that our current State Department of Social Welfare no longer exists in the sense of studying and giving services other than monetary relief.

Morris: Just passing out money, yes. That's an interesting point.

B. May: I would assume that under present circumstances it would have to be a citizens' organization that could best undertake change. But there's an election in November!

Morris: Yes. We don't have that on the ballot.

B. May: No, I was just thinking of --

Morris: The kinds of things one can ask one's --

B. May: We may have to cut out all these smarty remarks!

[Interview of April 18, 1974 continues.]

Bay Area United Crusade

Budget Panels

Morris: The two organizations you seem to have spent the most time with were the United Crusade and the League of Women Voters. Did one grow out of the other, or which one recruited you first?

B. May: I'll have to look at those dates. [Looks at vitae.] No, the budget committees of, first, the Alameda United Fund and, then, the United Bay Area Crusade came after the League of Women Voters and, I suppose, grew from the fact that I usually was willing to take a house-to-house solicitation for United Crusade.

Morris: You did? Good for you! Yes, that's sort of step one in many people's experience, I think.

B. May: Yes. It was usually a pleasant experience, though I recommended against continuing it in working class areas because it's horrible to wake somebody up and realize that he's been on a night shift and there's no way of telling, you know, when you ring a doorbell. I think the crusade no longer does it.

Morris: I don't know that they do any residential areas, any more. It seems to have shifted.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: How did the budget committees function?

B. May: The budget committee met before the crusade began its annual drive. These committees reviewed and criticized and recommended cuts or additions to the budgets of the agencies.

Morris: The member agencies?

B. May: The member agencies. We held budget hearings, at which the staff of a given agency would come and we'd ask them to justify their budget and its additions and cuts from the last year, if any. We often recommended that services that seemed to be overlapping not be carried out by two or more agencies. This was interesting, but in some ways discouraging, because there never was enough money and some of the agencies that found it easiest to raise money were ones whose services, the budget panels I served on felt, served middle class children rather than poor or minority children.

This was a period in which we were beginning to have practical concern for the racial minorities in the community and most budget panels had at least token representation, usually from blacks. For example, Dr. Norvell Smith, who was at that time research director, I believe, for the Oakland public schools, served on the first budget panel I served on. I saw him the other day and he laughed and said, "Well, Bernice, I'm back on a budget panel!" [Laughter] He's now, as you know, a vice chancellor.

Morris: At UC, yes. That's very exciting.

B. May: Yes. I'm sure Norvell wouldn't mind my saying that I think he contributed a great deal to the budget panel, but I think it was a period of growth and training for him, too.

Morris: He was quite a young man at that point.

B. May: Yes, he was very young and I'm sure he got some ideas of practical maneuvering and negotiation, because on all the budget panels there were people who had a particular concern for a particular agency.

Morris: Oh, that's interesting.

B. May: So, you see, that's the trouble with having a political mind! [Laughter] You see the trade-offs. I think this was a period of training for all of us.

B. May: Another man, who's been a friend and cohort through the years, who served on budget panels and, I think, continued longer than I did, was Daniel Dewey, who later served on the Berkeley City Council, but was then teaching Latin at Mills.

Morris: This was before he was headmaster of Anna Head?

B. May: Yes. As I recall it, Norvell Smith, Dan Dewey, and I, and maybe two or three others out of a panel of perhaps twenty, had no particular allegiance to a given agency, though we had perhaps most concern for the agencies that served low-income groups. It was in the air, and we were able to push the idea that it wasn't enough for an agency to be serving an area of good housing, low crime, and so on; they ought to be doing something down in what we were beginning to call the ghetto.

Morris: Out-reach kinds of thing.

B. May: Yes. I think that this was part -- a small part, but still part -- of the slow recognition in the Bay community of the disadvantaged areas.

Then, later, most of us participated in the long discussion of the making of one crusade for both the East and the West Bay.

Morris: How did this decision come about?

B. May: It was largely a financial consideration. It was debated and voted upon by the people who were members of the chest or the crusade, whichever one we were calling it then, which didn't take in a very large citizen group. But it was discussed quite fully in the planning agencies that were attached to the different chests.

One of the recommendations which came out of discussions in the Berkeley Social Planning Council and the Alameda chest organization was that the financial crusades should not be combined unless there were a regional social planning council. We felt that the social planning council report should precede and influence the final budget. I don't think that ideal has ever been reached. The Bay Area Social Planning Council was, while I was still serving, important in informing the budget panels and the final budget committee, but it is my impression, though it would take a closer study to firm this up, that there has not been the direct impact of prior social planning on the year's budget for the agencies. I think it's still a matter of

B. May: the financial money-raisers' decision as to: how much can we make?

Morris: Does the budget committee then have a later function after the money has been raised, to allocate that?

B. May: Yes, if there's --

Morris: If there's a shortfall?

B. May: Yes, or in the happy days, in that dreamland by and by, [laughter] when there's a surplus, the budget committee meets. At least while I was serving on the Bay Area ones, they referred major cuts back to the original budget panel. For instance, if you'd been comparing the children's agencies in your panel, you got the --

Morris: For a particular county?

B. May: No. We did it with all of the five counties in the crusade.

Morris: I thought that the fundraising part of it had gone areawide for a while before the counties' planning arm was combined. I thought there was a while in which there were individual area councils of social planning, separate ones in Berkeley and in Oakland.

B. May: These related to the individual chest organizations. Berkeley had its own, but it related to the Alameda County chest campaign, as I recall it. But those were dropped and a crusade covering the five counties was set up and there was great (and this turned out, I think, to be valid) discussion of the difficulties of volunteers studying what was going on in the agencies located in different communities.

I think this is inevitably a rather superficial way of planning. In the first place, it's greatly hampered by the lack of mass transit and by the time it took panel members to get from Orinda, say, to Sausalito or, more usually, San Rafael. Even with the notes from the central planning agency in hand, the investigations couldn't be very deep and you never could have a long enough meeting.

Morris: As a committee, or in terms of the individual agency?

B. May: As a committee and in terms of the workload of the agency, what their aim and goals actually were. But I'm sure it was better than no review at all.

Morris: That's interesting. Would you, on the panel, make decisions that this agency's program was not what it should be and therefore you were not going to fund them?

B. May: Yes, we did. These were always bitterly fought in the main budget committee. General types of service and the location of service in new sites were fought over bitterly, but probably not adequately, because we really didn't know a great deal about the neighborhoods.

New Communities and New Needs

Morris: Was this in regard to the brand new communities out in the south part of Alameda County and most of Contra Costa County?

B. May: Yes. And this, in the Alameda County review, was always a very difficult question: Does the south county, largely employed, largely white, really need this service as much or more than does the public housing area in Oakland?

I don't mean what I'm saying to be critical of a volunteer organization which was doing the best it could. What I'm saying is I don't think that's adequate.

Morris: It's a tough job when you're talking about the money for a whole county and, certainly, for the whole Bay Area, particularly when, as you say, there were always requests for more money.

B. May: Yes. And you also had the conflict, in a time of social change, between the established and sometimes revered agency, like the Boy Scouts of America. I know it was charging the same dues that it had charged during World War I, because my brother was a member then.

Morris: I think so, yes. And often not collecting it in the later years.

B. May: Yes. And many activities were the same and still located in comparatively well-heeled districts. They saw no reason to change their program and, for the most part, I think, haven't.

Morris: Then, there were new, young agencies?

B. May: Yes. I'm saying that beside this geographical-need conflict, there also was always the conflict between the old, established organization, which had been very useful and could continue to be useful, but here were new organizations coming up, recognizing new needs -- mental health agencies, for example, agencies for disturbed children.

What I feel is that there's great need for a broader concept of planning, though I'm not quite sure how to get it. In spite of my very real respect for the volunteer organization, I think that we need better tools to plan.

Morris: This was before there were social planning committees in city government?

B. May: Whose government, except Berkeley?

Morris: I assumed that by now they were a standard part of local government.

B. May: I don't think so.

Morris: That's interesting, because the evolution and work of the social planning department in Berkeley is something I'd like to get into when we get to the city council.

B. May: Yes. This is something we must check up, because, though I've been reading in municipal affairs, I haven't noticed a big surge of social planning departments within the municipal structure.

Part of the story, of course, is the difference between the plan and then what really happened.

YWCA: Giving Asilomar to the State of California

B. May: For example, part of the price of getting Asilomar sold to the state was that none of us who'd been associated with the YWCA could serve on the citizen board.

Morris: The state didn't want the Y -- ?

B. May: The governor didn't want us. It was Goody Knight.

Morris: I didn't think that anybody didn't like the Y.

B. May: Well, I really think this should be told as an indication of the climate of the time, because this was a time when people were being harassed for their views in varying degrees. It was a great shock to me to learn that the YWCA was, by ultra-conservatives, considered a subversive or borderline subversive organization.

Morris: Because of its sponsorship of the World Affairs Council?

B. May: No, no, I don't think so. Maybe, but, no, I thought it was its national reputation, which always was liberal, but not radical -- at least in Berkeley, we didn't think it was as liberal as the YMCA, for example. But, of course, everything in Berkeley is upside down! [Laughter]

Of course, the YWCA was always interracial and in the Asilomar committee group we had Sis Gordon, who was greatly respected in California, but was a staunch crusader for black civil rights. At that time, we were fighting public accommodations.

Morris: Yes. This was also the McCarthy era, too.

B. May: Yes, but I think Goody would have thought of it himself. [Laughter]

Morris: I see, even if there hadn't been national McCarthyism.

B. May: Yes. As you know, there was all this stuff about Hollywood.

Morris: Is Sis Gordon related to Margaret Gordon?

B. May: No. She's Walter Gordon's wife, Elizabeth Gordon.

Morris: Had you been a member of the Y?

B. May: On campus.

Morris: How did they happen to recruit you for their board?

B. May: Well, it was for this Asilomar committee. I'd been a student board member, but hadn't been particularly active afterwards. We've backed into this.

We really have to review the situation with the national YWCA first. If you want, we probably could finish up Asilomar more briskly than the League of Women Voters. So many things

B. May: we've worked on in the league have been continuous that it is difficult. So, let's talk about Asilomar. What date did I put down for it?

National Board Decision

Morris: You were on the Asilomar board from '49 to '53. Was it the postwar thinking in the national Y that set the stage?

B. May: Yes. The national YWCA had adopted a policy in the '30s and that they would assist local communities in securing appropriate YWCA buildings or clubhouses or whatever the community needed. Eventually, the local community would pay off the debt and assume financial responsibility for the building as well as the program. This policy worked well, but in California there were two unusual projects of the national YWCA that had no immediately supporting community. One was the residence club in Hollywood, which had been established largely by gifts from the film industry and was designed as a residence club for girls who wanted a place to live that would be inexpensive, respectable, and was at least an address that would be recognized if you ever got to see a top director. [Laughter]

Many girls did get launched and many girls did not. It had rather a shifting population, but it was a charming building. I was told that the YWCA in Los Angeles would have managed to take it over, but MGM and the others who put up the money for it said no, they liked the national prestige and they wanted it to continue to be national. You'll have to ask Mrs. Bartlett Heard, who was then on the national board of the YWCA, how that controversy ever came out.

But Asilomar was a much larger financial drain. It had had a very precarious history during World War II because, with the various war restrictions, student conferences were difficult to stage and it had been rented for one purpose or another. After 1945 the national YWCA said that the end had come. They were unwilling to continue to hold the property against their adopted policy. Mrs. Heard and other California members persuaded them to try again for student groups and were very successful, but the same policy problem remained.

Again, Mrs. Heard and local YWCA leaders said, "Well, while we're seeking a solution, can we have a YWCA management committee,

B. May: which will be made up of Californians and which will follow Asilomar closely and see what can be done?" As a former member of the Cal campus YWCA and as a person who was known to other people on the committee because of my League of Women Voters experience, I was invited to be one of this management committee.

I think it might be interesting, because many of them were Cal Berkeley people, to get you a list of that committee. I think Mrs. Heard would have it.

Morris: She's a remarkable lady, too.

B. May: For several years, we talked about this problem. One of the advantages of including some outsiders was that there were one or two of us, including myself, who were familiar with the state law that the state would accept donations and add matching funds for park property.

Morris: Yes. The state was developing its recreation and parks program at that point, quite energetically.

B. May: Yes. If organizations or individuals would make a gift of half the value of the property, if it fitted into state plans the state would put up the rest of the money. So, we suggested this to the committee and there was naturally a good deal of discussion of it and an attempt to find out which would be most advantageous to the YWCA.

The appraisals that we got were that the YWCA would probably lose money on the deal but not much. Asilomar was outside the city limits of Pacific Grove and the intensive development of the Monterey peninsula had not yet started. Even so, it would have been very easy to sell Asilomar for development. Part of the great beauty of Asilomar was and is the white sand dunes that move back and clutch at Asilomar development every year.

This was a tough question for the national board. We pointed out that the buildings, one or two of which are of great beauty, were done by Julia Morgan, and that the money for the major buildings had been gifts to the YWCA. As the news got around, the heirs of these donors said, "No indeed. We didn't give this with the notion that it should be sold, and housing or private enterprise of any kind come in, and we take a dim view of this." This helped us point out to the YWCA, to the national board, how we felt this would be a real gift that would be appreciated.

B. May: It's ironical that the YWCA is never mentioned in the official accounts of Asilomar now, but the state has never replaced the lectern in the main assembly hall and this says, in large letters, "YWCA," so that people who go there learn about it.

We really didn't incite these heirs of donors. They heard about it and came forth and said, certainly, if the YWCA was going to make money on it, they wanted their share. Then after long discussion, we got the national board to give their firm consent; so then we had to get the state to accept the gift. Here again, these fine buildings were an obstacle in the state's eyes, because they were thinking about this just as park land with those unique sand dunes.

Morris: As beach area and picnic area, rather than a conference ground.

B. May: Yes. And an open space area. And if there were to be buildings, certainly not a large kitchen and a large dining hall and all of this. The state wasn't in the business, they said, of running a convention center; you see, this was under another park director. So we had many meetings and we talked to members of the legislature.

It happened that in the midst of this, the assembly district that included Monterey and Pacific Grove was having an election and a young man named Fred Farr, who later made a name for himself in conservation legislation, was running. One of the residents of Pacific Grove who had been encouraging us to save Asilomar was supporting Fred Farr and asked Mrs. Heard and me down to see him.

The Asilomar Foundation

B. May: By this time, I should have explained, the national board had abolished its large management committee, but five of us who'd been serving on it formed a non-profit corporation and rented Asilomar from the YWCA. It was a non-profit corporation with no personal liability.

Morris: This was sort of an ad hoc corporation to tide things through until a decision was reached?

B. May: Until we could decide whether or not it was hopeless, that we weren't going to save Asilomar -- so that all we had to do was to keep out of debt. But people were very glad to have Asilomar

B. May: again and the convention business was good and the student business was very good.

Morris: So, the five of you ran Asilomar?

B. May: Yes. We had a manager and a staff.

Morris: Marvelous! Had it been closed for for a while?

B. May: It was closed down during World War II. It had reopened right after that under this management committee that the national board had appointed. And then they said, "Well, we just can't go on. We've got national board members going out for those meetings. You keep talking to us all the time." [Laughter] So, they said, "We're going to put an end to this and dismiss this management committee and sell the property.

Morris: Whose was the brilliant idea to form a non-profit corporation?

B. May: Winifred Heard's.

Morris: That was an unusual idea at that point, wasn't it?

B. May: I never heard of another one. We called it the Asilomar Foundation, just like all the big people! [Laughter] Rosenberg Foundation could have a foundation; why not us? We made a deal with the national board, the details of which I do not remember, but the property was free of any mortgage or any interest, so we assumed the responsibility for running it at no financial loss to them.

As I said, people's tastes were still simple. The simple quarters at Asilomar were good enough for them. Also, students were not as hard pressed financially as now and we had all the regular YM and YW meetings and a great many religious group meetings could afford to come. I think our charge for a student group was something like $5.50 a day including meals. How we broke even on it, I wouldn't know! Students, we feared, could be priced out of the market.

Anyway, we formed the corporation, five of us: Mrs. Heard as chairman; Elizabeth Gordon, Mrs. Walter Gordon; Helen Grant, a graduate from Cal Berkeley and then secretary of the Oakland YWCA; Mrs. Maude Empey, a pillar of the YWCA in San Jose and an independent businesswoman who sold real estate and insurance; and myself.

Morris: And you. That would be five.

YWCA Asilomar Management Committee at the conference grounds. ca. 1950

Left to right: Maude Empey, Helen Grant, Bernice May, Margery McHenry (national board member).

Left to right: Elizabeth Gordon, Bernice May, Winifred Heard, Roma Philbrick, Maude Empey.

B. May: Yes. And things went more briskly with only five! [Laughter]

Morris: That's marvelous! It's nice to hear that Mrs. Gordon stayed a part of the group.

B. May: But even so, we went to Asilomar for a full day's meeting about every two weeks during this period. We had a very good manager who the previous management committee had hired and whom we retained. Our only problem was now to get the state.

The Legislature and the Governor

B. May: As I said, we built up local support and Fred Farr was about to make his first run for any office. We'd been talking to people who we thought would help us in the legislature, both Democrats and Republicans, and we had received a great deal of encouragement from Mr. Joseph Knowland, then editor of the Oakland Tribune.

Morris: He was also a longtime member of the State Park Commission, wasn't he?

B. May: Yes, he was a member of the State Park Commission. He had a very considerable reputation, and deserved one, for not bothering about an absolutely strict party lines in regard to measures that he advocated. He as, for example, a real supporter of the state merit system, which Republicans in general did not support. So, we went down to talk to him and got his advice. He strongly supported it on the commission and with the governor, who was then Goodwin Knight. But we had not done any legislative lobbying.

When Fred Farr was converted by a local supporter of his to an interest in Asilomar, we went down to see him and talked it all over. He added it to his campaign and he was elected.

And this shows how naive we were. Winifred and I got on the train for Sacramento -- I guess, the next day, or maybe two days after the election -- and went up to Sacramento and began calling on all the members of the legislature that we knew and saying that Fred was going to introduce this bill and we were asking for support.

B. May: It wasn't until we got to Byron Rumford, who was a good friend of both of us, that anybody told us that Fred had not been sworn in yet [laughter] and that he wasn't even there. [Laughter] Well, we went right on.

We said, "What's the matter with that, Byron?"

He said, "There isn't anything the matter with it, but it's so funny!" [Laughter]

So, we went to see them all, all that we could, and when Fred Farr got up, he had a good start.

Morris: Everybody knew him when he got there! [Laughter]

B. May: [Laughter] And he had a nice little pocketfull of votes and the bill passed. Then the trouble was: would the governor sign it? So, we went to see the governor. He was very cold. We went on energetically and, I think, pointed out to him that this was a bi-partisan approach, that Mrs. Heard was a Republican and I was a loyal Democrat, and that we were getting support from both sides of the house. But he still was very cold.

So, we left him, I think probably at the urging of his secretary [laughter], because we were going to get that park off our hands or know the reason why, and went back to Berkeley. The next day, we went down to see "Uncle Joe" Knowland.

Morris: He was generally known as "Uncle Joe?"

B. May: Affectionately, yes. We talked to him and he said, "Oh, nothing to it. I'll just step up and talk it over." Then, a few days later, he called up Winifred Heard and said, "I can hardly bear to tell you this, but I have to. The governor says that he will sign the bill, if no member of the YWCA former board and no member of the Asilomar Foundation is given any responsibility for it. The governor said, 'I'm not willing to appoint them.'"

Morris: The bill specified that there would be a board?

B. May: It didn't specify, but somebody had to manage it, you see. We had offered to continue the Asilomar Foundation, but with change of membership. One of the conditions that the parks department had made, very sensibly, was that there should be a management board, and that this should not be added to the parks board's responsibility.

Morris: A broader group?

B. May: No, they weren't critical of the group. They just said they were not able to do it, and they weren't, with their wide responsibilities for state parks. So, somebody had to be suggested. We were sorry to hear it was not going to be us, but in a way, I think, we were relieved, because it was a real responsibility.

It finally was proposed that the City of Pacific Grove be asked if they would undertake Asilomar as a local council responsibility. They appreciated the value of having a park, and particularly a park that generated so many incoming visitors as Asilomar.

Morris: Local business.

B. May: Local business. So, they said yes, they would do it, and that was the final decision. But Mr. Knowland said that we would have to make up our mind whether we were willing to give it under the governor's restrictions and we said, of course we were, that we hadn't expected to be a permanent body, and that we were sorry that one or two of us were not going to continue if a citizen management committee was formed, but we were willing to have it go to Pacific Grove.

We had discussions ourselves with Pacific Grove and were able to make good recommendations to them, we thought, about the staff. While some of the staff people left voluntarily, Mrs. Roma Philbrook, our manager, is still there, now working directly for the state.

It's fun when I go to Asilomar. There are still quite a few members of the staff who recognize me and I them.

Morris: Isn't that nice!

B. May: It is nice. The girl who checks your meal ticket in the dining room, for instance, was working for Asilomar before I joined the board and is still there, looking hale and hearty.

But I have continued to resent that during a period of great fear of communism and radicalism that the Governor of the State of California without, as far as we knew, making any investigation of the people who formed the Asilomar Foundation or, indeed, as far as we knew, of the YWCA background and

B. May: policies, should lay down that kind of political restriction and that we, in a sense, had to take it, or give up our cherished plan of saving both open space and a public conference grounds.

As you probably know, under a different park board and a different superintendent, the State Recreation and Parks Commission decided that they would like to go into the convention business and it's been very successful, though on a higher level of service and higher charges than ours. Even allowing for inflation, their charges and level of service are on a higher level than the YWCA provided and student and small religious groups have been priced out.

Morris: I see. In other words, the state is operating Asilomar directly now?

B. May: They're operating it directly now, and hire the staff and manager directly. Some of the same groups, I'm sure, come. But the greater part of the business now is with organizations like the World Affairs Council, various training sessions for state employees, and the like.

As I say, this might have happened anyway under changing conditions for young people.

Morris: Did Governor Knight actually say to Joe Knowland that he didn't want any Y people on the board because they were such political radicals?

B. May: I didn't hear him, but this is certainly the impression we got from Mr. Knowland, in whose veracity I have every confidence. I'm sure he would put it as gently as possible, but he said that he didn't think that the governor was willing to appoint people who in themselves, and from an organization, he felt tended towards radicalism.

Morris: That's a remarkable insight into Knight's thinking.

B. May: I was not surprised as other members of the foundation were, because, though I had participated at some length and with great pleasure in Governor Earl Warren's conferences on social problems, when I was invited to head a section for the first one given under Governor Knight's auspices, the staff person from the Department of Social Welfare who was responsible for inviting people, who cleared with me first, had the embarrassing

B. May: task of calling up and saying that the governor had not approved my name, so that they would be delighted to have me attend the conference, but I was not invited to chair the section.

Morris: Good heavens!

The Anti-Communist Era

B. May: So, I was not as surprised as the rest of them. But let me say in mitigation that I think Governor Knight probably thought my husband was too progressive in his recommendations, particularly in regard to health insurance, and then one of my stepsons had views to the left of his father and to the left of my views, so that the governor, I think, would base his disapproval of my taking even a small leadership role in anything he was sponsoring more on what he personally thought of our family, rather than on the YWCA.

It's almost impossible to exaggerate the hysteria that we went through at that time and this is just the very mild fringe.

Morris: Yes. And it lasted on through '54 and later? Was it uninterrupted from the early '40s on through the '50s?

B. May: Yes. We'd have to look up a few votes on that. I've forgotten when the oath, which many of us thought an offensive one, for elected public officials and state employees was put through.

Morris: 1940, I think, was the first one.

B. May: Do you think it was as early as that?

Morris: Yes, I checked.

B. May: Because '40 was before the war.

Morris: That's right; that startled me, too. The first loyalty oath was then.

B. May: When was the year of the oath on campus?

Morris: '52.

B. May: That's what I thought, too. I would say that was the climax.

Morris: In our research on those years on the relations of the university and the state, we find some feeling that a part of the unpleasantness of the year of the oath was that some people in the legislature were not happy with Robert Gordon Sproul as president and used the loyalty issue to press him to resign. Was this your observation?

B. May: I remember one of my friends saying, "There are almost as many diverse reasons given for signing or not signing as there are individuals." Yes, I'm sure you're right about the loyalty oath, because there was a federal loyalty oath during my service with ESMWT. I'd signed it over and over and over again because that agency was documented in relation to individual courses and not to the total thing.

Morris: So, you had to sign a new one every time.

B. May: It seemed to me I was signing a new one every day or two, so that when I came to sign it for the City of Berkeley, it gave me no pause and yet I respected the conscientiousness of people who would have liked to have served the city who said that they couldn't take that oath.

But I would like to go back, before we leave Asilomar, to say that I think this transfer was a good plan for both the state and the YWCA and I'm exceedingly proud to have been involved in saving that piece of California's coast for public ownership and for a park.

Morris: I should say so. It's a really magnificent spot. It's a remarkable feat of management experience and political maneuvering that you ladies accomplished.

B. May: Oh, this is something Mrs. Heard wanted me to say -- it was very pleasant to hear the other day that when Fred Farr was asked to appear at the opening of a new residence hall at Asilomar that he --

Morris: He remembered the YWCA?

B. May: Well, he mentioned primarily Mrs. Heard and myself and Mrs. Empey, who he said really gave the shove that meant that Asilomar would be state property.

Morris: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, that's another nice benefit, too, if you got him started on a good career in conservation in the legislature.

B. May: Yes. I hear he's gone back into politics and he's running for Congress, I think, out of that district. I wish him luck.

VI LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA
(Date of Interview: April 26, 1974)

World War II Years

Morris: Did you talk about community affairs with campus colleagues -- did this contribute to your decision to become active in the League of Women Voters?

B. May: No, I really don't remember it as coming from campus associates, though I met many league members who were either working on campus themselves or their husbands were -- like Margaret Gordon, who, in addition to the job she was doing then at the Institute of Labor Relations, was a very active league member. I also had an old friend who had worked for the extension division before I did, Isobel Tapscott [Mrs. Allyn G.] Smith, who'd been a year or two ahead of me on campus, then had worked for the extension division, married and retired, and was, by this time, in 1941, a longtime state board member of the League of Women Voters.

Hearing that I wasn't going on with my extension job, she suggested -- first, I'm sure, to the state board and then later to me -- that I be invited to come on the state board to head up consideration of what local leagues might do in case the United States did enter the war, because in 1940 and '41 we were into Lend-Lease and it seemed likely from President Roosevelt's and other statements that the United States would enter the war eventually, though I think no one had anticipated Pearl Harbor.

I must say that there wasn't, as I recall it, great enthusiasm for this idea among local leagues. It probably again illustrated the inadvisability of taking someone who's had no experience with local groups and methods and putting

B. May: them in at the top. But we got some general plans together so that local leagues had lists of things that might be done, you know, if they got around to it.

So, my first assignment, I must say, was not a vast achievement because the local league response was, "We can't really plan until we know what's going to happen in and around our town." So, the chief thing we did was to set up a temporary plan for volunteering in city hall or a community center, if that seemed more appropriate, to do an information job and to handle the citizen inquiries.

When war came, the Berkeley league was one of the leagues that did go down to city hall and man extra telephones and deal with people coming in, directing them, for the most part, to other agencies, but hopefully directing them so they needed to go to only one agency before they found their place.

Morris: That's always a tricky job in a crisis.

B. May: Yes. This went on, I would say, for about a week. They did take lists of names and referred these lists to appropriate agencies -- Red Cross and the like.

As I think we've already said in talking about Engineering and Science Management War Training, I went back to work on campus in January of '42, roughly about a month after Pearl Harbor. This of course necessitated my resignation from the state board of the league because ESMWT was a full-time job in every sense of the word.

Morris: Yes. Did the league continue a program during the war years?

B. May: They did in the sense of acting on state and national issues relating to the war and, hopefully, looking ahead to planning for peace. They had no direct war relief or recruiting program that I know of.

Morris: What about the Japanese relocation issue, which was very much an issue in California? Did the league get into that at all?

B. May: I'm sorry to say that this is something I don't know. I recall, of course, that the city of Berkeley, for the most part, protested and many of us went down to see our Japanese friends and associates leave. On campus there was an active movement, in which my boss, Dean O'Brien, and my husband, Professor May, both took an active part of getting trained Japanese students out of California.

Morris: Before they were to be moved to relocation camps?

B. May: Before the date. Many of them went to Chicago.

Morris: Why Chicago?

B. May: Maybe that was far enough East, so it was thought they would be safe. For some of these men, I'm sure, the distance and the fare was important. People helped all they could, so a good many went.

Morris: Were there a group of faculty people at the University of Chicago who were, in a sense, a committee to receive them and help the Japanese students get settled there?

B. May: Again, this I don't know about. The efforts that I'm mentioning were largely with graduates, trained men. Many of the engineering graduates were taking advanced courses in the evening at the College of Engineering. My husband's references, and this maybe is one reason that I remember Chicago particularly, were primarily to 1313.

Morris: [Laughter] It took me some time to research that and find that it refers to 1313 Brownlow Street.

B. May: Yes. It's the number of a center which houses the city manager's association, ASPA, or the American Society for Public Administration, the international organization of chiefs of police -- you can just go on and on.

Morris: They're all in the same building?

B. May: They're all in the same building.

Morris: What a marvelous place!

B. May: It is marvelous. When you go to 1313, you see everybody. It had a small staff and a very efficient secretary. This would be the place for Japanese graduate students who had some training in administration to go.

Morris: It was a clearing house for people looking for jobs and fellowships and things of that sort?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: I see. Was this attached to the University of Chicago?

B. May: No, it was not. It was located in Chicago, I suspect, because Chicago is so convenient to reach.

Morris: For wherever you want to go in the country.

B. May: Yes. Of course, in those benighted days, everybody from the West except hogs and cattle had to change trains in Chicago. So, we usually spent a day there. The thing to do would be to go to 1313. I sometimes begged off and went to the Art Institute [laughter], but then women are frivolous!

Morris: Were these organizations that your husband had helped to set up when public administration was a young field?

B. May: Yes. This was also certainly very much encouraged by the University of Chicago, but it was set up as an independent center. I'm sure Northwestern was also concerned with it, because Northwestern pioneered in the early training of police and especially traffic police.

To go back to my days in the extension division, we gave in the extension division, at the instigation of the international organization of chiefs of police, the first training institute for traffic police that had been given in California. This was very well attended and very successful. Together with the instructor in charge, I presented the certificates of completion.

About a week after that, I was coming home across the Bay Bridge in a great hurry and was stopped, not for speeding, but for changing lanes too frequently. When the officer came up, he was one of the men who'd got a certificate. I've never done that again because he looked at me so sadly and he said, "Oh, I thought you really meant it when you were so complimentary in regard to our efforts."

Morris: Oh, dear! What a coincidence.

B. May: It served me right. I shouldn't have been doing it.

Now, we're back at the league and I'm through with my war job and have decided not to look for another professional job. I was invited to go back on the state board.

Morris: You went back on the state board when Ruth Scheer became president, didn't you, after the war?*

B. May: Yes.

Morris: It's listed on your vita as 1945-56 and the league year usually begins in May or June.

B. May: Yes. We elected the board in the odd-numbered years. I went on this board, which was headed by another graduate of Cal Berkeley, Ruth Weston Scheer.

Morris: You remember everybody's maiden name. That's very helpful.

B. May: Well, that's the way people who knew them in college think of them. Ruth is Mrs. George Scheer; he is a graduate of the College of Electrical Engineering at Berkeley and has given his advice to the league through many years. He says we've seldom taken it, but that he believes in education.

Increasing Member Participation

B. May: My particular assignment on Ruth Scheer's board was to help local leagues adjust to the new by-laws and new structure which the national league was recommending. The aim of this program was to make the league truly a membership body with the members more deeply involved in the selection of program and of positions that the league would take.

The league before this had been structured largely to develop specialists in fields of league interest who then presented recommendations to local league membership meetings, or at state conventions or sometimes to state meetings to consider the issue.

Morris: In other words, there were standing committees on certain broad subjects.

---

*Asked if it wasn't unusual for a recent member to be appointed to the state board, Mrs. Scheer replied that Mrs. May was so able, they were proud to have recruited her. Ed.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: And then the change was to membership educating itself on an issue?

B. May: The change was our present system with units and the attempt to involve all members in league decisions. Another big change was that it had been decided nationally that each local league should relate to a given unit of local government that provided at least three governmental services. That was to allow women living in unincorporated communities to organize around an area that perhaps conducted elections, ran schools, provided sewers. But the big thrust was to relate the leagues specifically to a responsible unit of government. Many leagues were organized around communities that had a sense of community, but no governmental structure, like the Padua Hills League.

The national board recommendation was against leagues related to county government. This provoked a long, hard struggle in California because there were leagues that got on very happily and felt that they had been influencing local planning without being related to the municipal structure. The change, however, had been made -- and they had to revise all their by-laws.

We never did get them all done in California. The Monterey County league outlasted the revision period and fifteen years later they were vindicated. The national league changed its mind and said that you could organize leagues in relation to county and larger units.

So, during that two years, I was engaged primarily with helping, coercing, cajoling local leagues to make these two reforms, to give up depending on experts in whose hands the preparation of the material of the pros and cons of a given issue was left. We had an organization committee and visited every league in California.

The national board did not leave us unhelped in this. They sent out -- and to our great pleasure -- a national board member, then Lucille Hemming, Mrs. Charles Hemming, a San Franciscan who'd lived in New York for many years, and who is now Mrs. Daniel Koshland -- the wife of one of the university's very distinguished alumni, Dan Koshland. They live down the Peninsula, where Lucille now is one of the stalwarts of the San Mateo League.

Morris: Yes. Mr. Koshland is one of the area's great benefactors and a keeper of an eye on the good works of the community.

B. May: In fact, of California and of the university, a great supporter and kindly critic of the league.

Morris: It's interesting to know about these husband and wife teams, like yourself and your husband, and you say Mr. Scheer also was very much aware of and involved in his wife's activities.

B. May: To digress, out of those who served on the state board in the '40s, we formed a group of husbands and wives who still have two or three parties a year. We've had a number of house parties. We once -- ten of us, I think -- went to the Islands together.

Morris: How marvelous!

B. May: One of the husbands was teaching at the University of Hawaii and had exchanged a house with the man who was coming to replace him at Stanford for a semester, so some of us went over to see them and stayed with them.

Morris: [Laughter] Well, certainly! You wouldn't want them to be lonesome over there.

B. May: This, I think, is rather unusual in volunteer organization that you do stay together this long and I'm sure it happens with other league groups.

During this time, we were also organizing new leagues.

Morris: Because of the growth of the population during the war?

B. May: Yes and also because we had long wanted to -- it was a standing joke at that time that the League of Women Voters had followed the Franciscan Fathers up the coast. During this period of time, some of the leagues we organized were Bakersfield, Chico, Napa (that was back on the Mission Trail again) -- Kern, and others.

One of the sticky situations that we would find, particularly in the Central Valley then was that the league's policy of membership open to all races was not always appreciated. When we selected a meeting room for organization meetings and so on, we would have to make it very clear, that if we were having a supper with women who were interested that everybody who came was to be served.

B. May: This sometimes left us high and dry because we didn't really have many black or Oriental members and those that we had tended to be issue-minded, so that we sometimes had trouble recruiting the minority member to show. Of course, today we'd say, "Well, that's tokenism," but I still think it was worth doing then because it began in a very modest way the long, slow process toward equal rights.

Morris: Were there black and Oriental members in some of the bigger, more urban leagues?

B. May: Not a great many. One of the reasons for this, I think, is, or was, that the league then, as it does now, required lot of activity and the type of woman who was interested in governmental affairs and public issues was usually working so hard on NAACP or Urban League or the program for the Negro colleges that she felt she didn't have the time to undertake a league responsibility.

Morris: Would a league organization ever have a joint meeting with an NAACP or an Urban League group if there was a particular issue that both might be interested in?

B. May: I don't recall this being done.

Morris: Or any contact between the state boards? NAACP has a state organization, too, doesn't it?

B. May: When we were working on state legislative issues that might concern a black organization, we certainly tried to recruit their help. But there was not a regular exchange of legislative information. We had not yet made this an active part of league's lobbying.

Support for State Merit System

B. May: So, the legislative program of the league at this time was still, as I recall it, largely related to improving governmental structure, making the executive and legislative branches more effective, very active support of the merit system for state and local employees.

This had been a national campaign of the leagues in the '30s, but it had been a particular campaign of our state league as well. Predecessors of those of us who were working in the

B. May: middle '40s were people like Kate Goslin Nachtrieb, who, with a group of representatives of the State Personnel Board and of university departments related to government, wrote the basic act underlying California's merit system and helped to secure the passage of an enabling section of the state constitution.

Morris: Yes. Didn't they call that blanketing in, so that all the state departments came under this merit system rules at the same time?

B. May: Well, blanketing usually refers to retaining people who are already employed. The great advantage of this reform was that it extended a modern, carefully planned merit system to all state departments. Now, this has been changed from time to time. As you probably know, merit systems generally are now under attack. They're always under attack from politicians who want more patronage. Merit systems in general are under a very real attack now in the attempt to establish a quota system for appointments of minority groups and women. Women are still the only majority that behaves as if they were a minority and are trying very hard to get themselves labeled as such. The great danger, of course, if you put a person's sex or color above their qualification, is that you cannot be sure of getting the best qualified employees.

This is not to say that the merit system procedures should not be changed to encompass reforms such as the careful relationship of the language of examinations to the requirements of the job, the elimination of written examinations for some types of less skilled work, the making sure that opportunities for public employment are made known, not only through the media that reach white persons, but also the media that reach other groups. But once we begin saying, "We're going to have to look out for this minority," we'll soon find that we're <u>all</u> members of a minority.

I read the other day a very amusing analysis of the board of a learned society. This said that this board should relate to the people working in this scholarly field, so that you should have so many of this and so many of that on the board, and that there always should be four stupid ones to take care of that minority.

Morris: [Laughter] Oh, that's lovely! It really is.

B. May: This is something that we have to consider carefully and I hope that the league will retain its interest in and support for merit systems.

President: 1947-1949

B. May: At the next league convention, I was nominated and elected to be president of the League of Women Voters.

Morris: That's quite a job and quite an honor.

B. May: [Laughter] It is but also it takes lots of time and lots of work. I am sorry to say that at that moment it took a willingness to spend money. Not that we supported the league, but one of the things my board did was to decide that in so long and expensive a state the league ought to pay travel expense at least. So, we kept track of our travel expenses and turned them in as a contribution to the league.

Morris: That's an interesting way of keeping track of what it actually does cost.

B. May: So that we would have a realistic travel figure. Since we were paying our own expenses, we usually had very good dinners [laughter] and we were able to make big savings when real money was involved.

Morris: [Laughter] Who was your finance chairman? I assume it was your finance chairman who produced that suggestion. Do you recall?

B. May: I ran across a list of my board in some of this stuff. [Looks through papers.] Well, we'll look this up later because I've got a list of them someplace and I'd really like to include them, because there were a number of people from UCLA or the Berkeley campus on my board.*

Morris: Was this an unusual number of people from the universities to be active in the league?

B. May: No, I don't think so. I think the league has usually appealed to women with college background. We had Stanford graduates

---

*The California Historical Society supplied the following list of persons elected to the state board of the California League of Women Voters on May, 1947 -- Officers: Mrs. Samuel May, Mrs. Allyn Smith, Mrs. Alan Taft, Mrs. Rudolph Marx, Mrs. Helen Younce, Mrs. William McMahon; Directors: Mrs. Mildred Perry White, Mrs. Harold Conroy, Mrs. George Scheer, Mrs. Max Stern, Mrs. Chalmers McGaughey, Mrs. Albert Decker. Ed.

B. May: and other college graduates on it, too. But I think the league everyplace does appeal to women who have had some university education. We'll look up that list of members.

Morris: Fine. If it doesn't turn up here, I can check it in the league office.

B. May: I've seen it since I've been looking through this material, but I don't seem to have pulled it out.

Other Legislative Interests

Encouraging Party Responsibility

B. May: The legislative issues, as such, that we were talking about and working on at that time usually extended over a number of years. One of the longest ones was the question of party responsibility.

Morris: There was discussion of partisan political activity?

B. May: Oh, "partisan." What a word!

Morris: Oh, I meant local political activity.

B. May: "Partisan" always seems to have a perjorative flavor. We called that being active in your own party, supporting your own party, which, of course, wasn't open to anyone who held a league office at any level, but was open to league members. As we thought about party responsibility in California, we decided that we wanted to repeal one of Hiram Johnson's measures, the provision of cross-filing, under which everybody filed for all the parties that they wanted to and serious candidates always filed for both Republican and Democratic.

Morris: That was just after Earl Warren had been reelected as governor and won both primary elections, the Democratic and the Republican.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Did league members feel that this was an unfair advantage, to cross-file?

B. May: No, because, after all, whatever the law of elections says is fair and has been ratified, as this had, by a vote of the people, is what the people want. But the league felt that it was not working out well, that it deprived the voter of choice between different concepts of state government, and that if you were going to hold your party responsible, that its candidates should be running on a platform which had differences from their opponents.

It took a long time to do this and cross-filing reappears and reappears on the league program. Some years after I'd been state president we thought that we'd done a great deal because we got it incorporated in the Democratic platform for the state of California and in the Republican platform, where these noble words just reposed for some years. [Laughter] But eventually, as you know --

Morris: It was the late '50s, I think, when the voters finally did away with cross-filing.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Did you testify before the legislature and visit the legislators in the process of -- ?

B. May: I don't remember going up on cross-filing, but the league undoubtedly did. We had a legislative chairman, who came out of the Sacramento league, but was also an old friend from the Cal Berkeley campus, Beatrice Marks Stern, Mrs. Max Stern who had been active in campus activities. She represented the league at the legislature, though from time to time various other people would go up. As I recall, Charlotte McGaughey from the Los Angeles league carried the cross-filing recommendation during those years because it had come out of a study that she had headed.

Child Care

B. May: As I think back over the things that we pushed in the legislature, they'll all have a very familiar ring to you. California had a good system of child care centers for war industry and we supported making child care centers permanent.

Morris: Every two years that battle had to be repeated.

B. May: Every two years, yes, this battle had to be fought over again. We didn't succeed in having them related to the places where women worked, but eventually, as you know, the child care centers and the regulation of child care centers was put under the schools.

Morris: Oh, I just remembered hearing a marvelous tale that Artie Samish himself used to tell, about how he lent a hand in the final effort that got the legislature to make them permanent. Do you recall that?

B. May: I don't. Not that I'm saying the league did it all by itself, because many other organizations worked on it, and Mr. Samish might have. It wouldn't have interfered with his lobbying for the liquor industry at all.

Morris: Well, that was his point; it didn't interfere with that and it was a favor to a friend sort of a thing. I wondered if that's just his present memory, or if at the time you would have been aware of it.

B. May: I don't remember it.

Morris: Were you aware of Mr. Samish?

B. May: Oh, of course! Everybody in California was aware of Mr. Samish.

Morris: At the time?

B. May: Yes. Later, when I was serving on a state board under Gertrude Williams, Mrs. Henry Williams, the league supported a much needed reform in alcoholic beverage control, which did, indeed, mitigate many of the abuses of the liquor trade, though we didn't get all that we wanted.

Morris: Did the state board have much contact with the legislature?

B. May: Not a great deal, no. Just those of us who would go up on -- for example, I remember going up on child care centers and on meetings concerned with the California Water Plan, which we weren't calling quite that in those days.

Water Use: State and National

B. May: This, I think, marked the first time that the California league had been concerned with a major plan, which we felt would mitigate flooding and provide water for parts of the state that had very little. Now many of us are sorry that we didn't know more then and that we didn't plan a little more broadly, because -- I believe that the league would join me in this, because it's certainly the attitude of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area -- adequate study was not made of the impact of agricultural waste and other polluting elements on the waters of the Sacramento-San Joaquin estuary and there was not sufficient protection given to the fishing, both sport and commercial fishing, in the river, the bay and even in the ocean because the development of the small fishes and the food for them is part of the chain of life that extends into our ocean fishing.

So, maybe we were a little hasty about supporting the water plan, but we did, and now I hope our influence will help to get a revision, because it's not hopeless. We could stop the pollution and this certainly would include the pollution of the comparatively few bay cities that still dump sewage into the bay. But that's a story for a little later on when --

Morris: When you get into the Bay Area government.

B. May: Yes. To finish up on our entry into the field of clean water and adequate water, during my presidency I was directed by the California leagues to go to the national convention and present, as an added item on the national agenda, a proposal that the league use the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) which had been supported by the league in the '30s, as an example and study other great river systems in the United States to see if a TVA-like pattern would be workable and desirable elsewhere.

Morris: How did you fare at the national convention?

B. May: We lost. However, we did have the satisfaction of presenting this viewpoint. The timing undoubtedly was wrong. The national board was, as usual, short of money. They had other issues on which they wanted to put their time and energy. It was a not recommended item. We didn't have a very large delegation, so that the few of us who were there, chiefly me, had to make the presentation. We were undoubtedly handicapped by the fact that none of us had ever been to a national league convention before. So we had no notion of the internal politics.

Morris: And the process of trying to develop support from individual leagues.

B. May: We did have some support. We had written to other leagues in advance, but we might have done better if we had put it off another two years and had advocated and talked; but then, one never can tell.

Morris: I was wondering if this reflected discussions on the state board of the whole matter of financing the water needs of California and then the other part of that, isn't it, the 160-acre limitation on agricultural holdings, which seems to be a chronic issue in water management?

B. May: Leagues never talk about it. That's a sacred cow. It is! I think it's an absurd way to plan land use, but still it's a liberal sacred cow.

Ten acres is fine for strawberries, but for lettuce you need much more land and for cotton vast acreage. It's an arbitrary measure, like height for policemen. The 160-acre restriction isn't relevant in discussing TVA. It is advocated by the federal Reclamation Bureau for areas where water is scarce and does not appear in TVA where water is abundant and conservation and anti-pollution are the problems.

The California leagues have been concerned about water quality, since water has been a continuing problem in the state from the mining days on and the pollution of water --

Morris: From the mining days on. [Laughter]

B. May: Yes. The league had nothing to do with it, but one of our earliest reforms in California was the stopping of hydraulic mining. Even so, it was only after lots of good topsoil had gone out into the Pacific Ocean, and many local communities were concerned about water. So, this is what we had decided to propose, but it was defeated so, really, overwhelmingly that it was never proposed again, though we continued to support issues related to the conservation of, and the provision of, clean water.

Passage and Repeal of Proposition 4

Morris: While you were president, there was a very interesting ballot measure. Do you recall Proposition 4, in 1948 -- the one that rearranged the social welfare structure?

B. May: Yes. The league opposed this.

Morris: How clever of you!

B. May: Well, think of how many league positions it violated. It named an official as head of the Department of Social Welfare. It put her in the constitution and you were going to have to get a vote of the people to get her out again. I'll have to check; my impression is that it was a constitutional amendment.

Morris: Yes.

B. May: And froze into the constitution a great many provisions that should not have been there, amounts and so on, and altogether was a very poor proposition. It was thought up and pushed by a man named George McLain, who was particularly interested in senior citizens and in getting them increased support from the state.

The league opposed it. We were also opposing at that time the initiative that required that no public housing be built without an authorizing vote of the people of the community. We had good relations at that time, as I'm sure the league still has, in the exchange of ideas with such organizations as the Taxpayers' Association and the State Chamber of Commerce. We found, in talking to them, that they didn't think that the welfare proposition was going to pass, and that they were sure that the housing initiative (which they were supporting, of course, because they wanted to stop public housing), would not pass. We assured them that the housing was going to pass, and that they ought to help us fight the McLain proposition, but they didn't agree.

It did pass and then it was interesting and pleasant to have the group of business organizations, who wanted at once to start a repeal, invite the California Council for the Blind and the League of Women Voters to head a joint campaign to repeal Proposition 4, which we, after due consideration, were delighted to do.

I was the past president by then, you see, so I could -- and did -- carry that part of the campaign.

Morris: Were you chairman of this ad hoc committee?

B. May: Not the person with the real power. The -- oh, you know, those very skillful professional campaigners --

Morris: Whitaker and Baxter?

B. May: Whitaker and Baxter did the actual work.

Morris: Was it Clem Whitaker or Leone Baxter who did the actual planning on that? Do you recall?

B. May: I think they were both in on it. It was a big campaign. We raised a lot of money. Then the man who made a specialty of getting petitions signed and getting the signatures -- I've forgotten his name.

Morris: Joseph Robinson, who died a few years ago.

B. May: Yes, he's the one. Well, he was going to do that. "Well," we said, "This is something we can help on.

Morris: We can qualify it for the ballot?

B. May: No, we weren't going to say we could qualify it for the ballot, but we could help, we said. He said, "Oh, it isn't worth it." Then he said, "I'll bet you lunch that you can't get -- " I've forgotten how many signatures he said; I think 20,000 signatures, with amateurs -- oh, the league members did much better than that! I can't remember whether I ever collected the lunch or not, but the league got real credit for this. It was a good, hard-fought campaign. As you know, the initiative to repeal this did pass.

State and Local Mental Health Service

B. May: Another interest of the league at this time was extension of the state mental health program and support for the Short-Doyle Act, which finally was passed in 1957. Later, local leagues followed this up in their own communities as, interestingly enough, the Berkeley league did during my first term as councilman in Berkeley.

Morris: By starting their own program?

B. May: By advocating that the City of Berkeley, which had its own health department, start its own mental health program.

Morris: Dr. Hume, who was Department of Mental Hygiene director of community services, describes what she saw as a very successful effort to recruit local community organizations in support of the Short-Doyle Act.* Do you recall that as being an issue on which there were more than the usual number of organizations active and interested?

B. May: No, I don't, because almost every piece of legislation that related to a perceived social need did, at least among women's organizations, have a widespread of consideration and support. There was, at that time, though I believe it is no longer active, an organization on state legislation, which was an exchange organization open to any women's organization which took action on state issues. Just one state issue was enough to bring you in and, as I recall it, we met about three times a year and exchanged viewpoints and then, if it seemed practical, made a plan for joint action.

Morris: That sounds like a good idea. What happened to it?

B. May: It was a good idea. This was after I was out of the league active program and into politics. I believe that they had decided to take action in the name of the entire group and then several delegates, when they got back home, were told by their organizations, "We didn't send you there to take action. We just wanted to know what people were doing."

Morris: When we were talking about the league's efforts in the Water Plan, I was reminded that one of the issues there was the north versus the south. It was the south that needed the water and people in the north came to feel they would be short of water. Was this pull and haul between the interests of the north and the south visible within the league at all, either organizationally or in the way people responded?

B. May: Yes, but this had gone on for years and we thought this time that there would be adequate controls to protect the north. But since then, people who have studied it, particularly in some of the counties along the estuary, like Contra Costa, realize that they're being short-changed, because they aren't really sure of getting enough water in a dry year to maintain

---

*See Dr. Hume's memoir in The Bancroft Library. Ed.

B. May: the gradual change in the estuarine system from salt water to fresh water. This is a very delicate operation, involving the fertility of the Delta lands as well as the development of such fish as salmon and steelhead and others that come up the river to spawn in fresh water, but are killed if the change from the ocean to the fresh water is not in the proper relationships. Of course, it's more complicated than this. Many of the smaller fish are affected also.

Yes, this discussions had been going on for years and we thought that an acceptable plan had been arrived at. The critical point is: When do you cut off the flow of water south to preserve the estuarine system of rivers and the bay.

Morris: The balance in the north, yes. Were there problems within the board on the point of view of the south versus the point of view of the north on issues in general or the way you looked at things?

B. May: I think it would be fair to say, at least on the boards on which I served, that the northern league members were concerned earlier with people problems and with social services and that the southern area was more concerned with governmental structure.

Morris: That's interesting.

B. May: I think nominating committees tried to find out our various party affiliations and make a kind of rough balance there.

Legislative Relations

Morris: Do you recall any members of the legislature as being either particularly receptive to working with a citizen organization or who perhaps felt that citizens were not all that useful?

B. May: Well, politicians always, of course, speak kindly to voters [laughter] and I don't think I've ever appeared before a legislative committee without having the chairman say, "And this is Mrs. May, who's representing the League of Women Voters, an organization we're always glad to welcome, because they know what they're talking about." This was always gratifying.

Even more gratifying was the time I went up to Sacramento to support the establishment of the Bay Conservation and

B. May: Development Commission, while it was being considered. Assemblyman Knox presenting the bill asked my affiliation and I said, "The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area."

He said, "Mrs. May, I think I've got the votes. Do you want to make a speech, or are you supporting it?"

I said, "Oh, I'm supporting the bill." He said, "Thank you."

Morris: [Laughter] Oh, that's charming! That's delightful!

B. May: I'm sure there are many members of the legislature who are pressed for time and sometimes would be, if we aren't supporting their bill, be just as glad not to see us. Even though all the boards since the '40s, I think, have suggested such reforms as recording the votes in the minutes of committee hearings and other changes, so far the legislature has not seen fit to carry out our suggestions, though I am sure they were glad to have our support of their setting their own salaries! [Laughter]

Morris: How did that come about?

B. May: The salaries were in the constitution and this was taken out on the plea that salaries should not be frozen but adjusted to current conditions.

Morris: The local leagues have a practice of keep-in-touch calls upon their local legislators. Do the state board members have any similar keeping-acquainted things with the legislative leaders and committee chairmen?

B. May: I don't know what the practice is now. State board members used to go, if possible, with local area leagues to interview our assemblymen and state senators.

Public Finance Studies

Morris: We haven't touched on league positions on financing. Didn't the league do quite an extensive study of the financing of state government and then the financing of education in the '50s, when you were on the board?

B. May: Yes. I would say that all through my period of active service

B. May: with the league we were studying financing. We, in those days, required that before the league proposed an expanded or a new state service, we must have considered how it should be organized, how it should be administered, and how it should be financed.

Morris: Were there any particular needs or issues in state finances that started the league studying this, or was it an update kind of a thing?

B. May: I think the league has studied finances and taxation throughout its history in California and I think it will continue to do so because circumstances change.

The imposition, for example, in Alameda County of the support of some 163 special districts on the property tax has put that whole segment out of skew, it seems to me. While things have been done to mitigate the impact on senior citizens, it still doesn't protect the low-income person in general, who, it seems, pays more taxes than many very high officials.

Morris: The information we're hearing lately certainly seems to indicate that the tax burden is unevenly distributed.

B. May: In general, I think, the league has supported the expansion of income tax and the extension of the income tax to all cities as less regressive than the heavy use of the sales tax.

Special Districts v. Regional Government

Morris: Were these policies being developed during the '50s? Had the idea of regional government begun to be formulated?

B. May: Yes, it certainly came in the '50s. We, again, would have to look at league documents to see when regional leagues, made up of a group of local leagues with the same regional interests, were organized. Most areas began by doing it on a county basis, but very early in the Bay Area, and Los Angeles followed soon afterwards, we discovered that what we were concerned about were regional problems. The leagues organized to consider those and to consider both solutions and ways of administering and financing them. The consensus in this area, I believe, is still that the special district tends to be invisible to the voter,

B. May: tends to survive forever, though it may not continue to be needed. Some years ago, I was amused and saddened to notice on my tax bill that I was paying as much for mosquito control as I was for clean air.

Morris: That's about the way it works out, yes.

B. May: Now I think air pollution has moved a few cents ahead. I'm not saying mosquito control should be abolished, but I think it should be looked at.

Morris: Yes. Maybe a good place to end up today would be with what you observed about the political process from your view on the state league, observing the legislature and working with it.

B. May: I am very supportive of party organization, despite the doldrums that our parties seem to be in now. I think we do need reform of campaign financing and also that we need more ways of entry at the local level to elected governmental service. This is why I would like to see party identification and party nominations extended to local government. Very few people agree with me, I think, in regard to this. But this would mean that with the many local units in government, there would be a chance for more people with many different viewpoints and experiences to serve on a public decision-making body. I think it would be much better to educate them by experience as councilmen or supervisors and not start them off as governors, as has happened recently.

Of course, the conditions of the election for a given office have to be carefully considered so that it is under practical voters' control. For example, we have a couple -- many more than a couple -- of elected boards in this area that are not subject to effective elections because the districts are so large that the campaigns are exceedingly expensive and it's very difficult for someone who's not an incumbent to break in.

Morris: Are you thinking about ones like the regional park district?

B. May: The regional park district is one. I think Mary Jefferds of Berkeley, who was elected recently to that board, is one of the very few board members who were not appointed and then elected as an incumbent.

In general, I would say that for an elected board you should have a district no larger than an assembly district.

Morris: Others who were familiar with the legislature in the late '40s and early '50s say that there seemed to be a new crop of legislators come into the California legislature. They'd increased the salaries a bit and apparently there was a new breed of younger men with wider, or at least different, interests in public service. Do you recall any of that?

B. May: Certainly there have been some, but then you think of the many veterans who have been there so many years, right out of our own districts. As a good conservationist, I would hate to lose Senator Petris, though he operates in conservation by shock tactics. I think you'd have to look back and see what the normal rate of turnover is.

Morris: You don't recall being struck by a large number of noble, new faces?

B. May: No. I've been struck by seeing fewer noble faces, it seems, today. I think, except in the field of conservation, that there hasn't been a great deal of innovative legislation passed in the last four years.

We've got some tax relief, but not a systematic reform with a carefully worked out system of taxation.

Morris: A re-study of the whole tax structure?

B. May: Yes. Taxation is going to be oppressive until we do that, until we see where the burdens can best fall.

Morris: Well, I think this is a good place to stop for today. Next time we meet, we might get on to Berkeley politics.

Continuing Responsibilities

(Date of Interview: May 2, 1974)

B. May: As a member of Gertrude Williams' state board for the league, I headed a large committee in 1955 to review for the League of Women Voters of California the positions that had been taken by the league in the fields of government to which it had given sustained attention. We turned out working papers on the positions taken, the related principle of government supported by the league, the action had been taken and pros and cons on continued action.

B. May: So, if to accompany our oral history we would like to have a sustaining document, this review covers what the league did in some fields since the Depression, in others since World War II. These documents illustrate the shift of the league and, I believe, the shift of many others who thought about government, to social and economic problems rather than structural problems. Here you see the first mention, for example, of the league's opposition to discrimination -- race, sex, and so on -- and the league's support in many fields which are no longer in the league area of action.

My question of you is: This particular file is filled with league communications and other extraneous things, but I would like to pull out of the records ten or twelve working papers and if Bancroft will do the typing, I could easily index them. They are now only to be indexed by the league code, which goes back to other material in the league manual. I think this would give a person who wanted to check on the development of concern, particularly for social problems, another document which would cover in some detail what actually happened in the field of protection of the child, for instance, or education.

Morris: I think that would be very valuable, yes. I've got the page of the final report here, on public health and mental hygiene, which list things back to the early days of the California Civic League and legislation they supported in registration of births and nursing standards.* This is 1915, 1918, 1919. [Looks through pamphlet.] I see medical insurance has been before the League of Women Voters since 1934 and '35.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: That's a long time.

B. May: There's been much disagreement on health insurance.

Of course, for a league member, this stuff is fascinating.

Morris: And for anybody interested, as you say, in the development of social issues. I think the league deserves full marks for having been studying these issues as long as anybody else and keeping their hand in.

---

*"Continuing Responsibilities," 1958.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: [Reading through record.] I see that: "By 1942, enough leagues had made a study of the problem of health and medical insurance to come to an area of agreement as to the objectives, which were to assure every person the opportunity for comprehensive medical services at a high standard." But there's no record that the league took a position or became involved when medical insurance was in the legislature in 1945 and '47.

B. May: Well, look through the last sheet. I haven't reread that paper, but my memory is that we didn't get permission from the league to support it, but we weren't required to opposed it either. That is, no solid consensus was developed.

Morris: Marvelous. I'm delighted that you found this.

B. May: I've been sending out cries for help on this in all directions. Editha Dunn, who came on the state board in, I think, '53, said, "Well, you idiot, don't you remember that you did that review and you and Hazeltine [Taylor] wrote or pulled together a great many of the papers."

A great many other people also worked on the papers and it was a fun job. Hazeltine Taylor and I went down once or frequently twice a week and worked in the Palo Alto office, which was where the league's state office was at the time.

Morris: Didn't you say that while you were president the office was here in Berkeley?

B. May: Yes. Over Fraser's on Telegraph Avenue.

Morris: Did this mean that whenever there was a new state president, the office moved?

B. May: The office moved to some spot convenient to her home, but one of the things we kept saying was that there was tremendous wear and tear and loss of work that had been done. You'd get everything filed before shipping and then it would be hastily put on shelves just to get those packing cases off the floor of the new office. There was a lot of wasted effort in moving files back and forth.

Morris: All the accumulated records and everything would be moved to a new location every two years?

B. May: Everything would be moved. The California league at that time alternated the presidency, four years in the south and four years in the north. You practically never could get anybody to serve two terms as a state president. Their families would protest. But usually the office was not moved while it was north or south.

Of course, Ruth Scheer preceded me from Berkeley as president and while I'm sure there was some muttering in the ranks when Berkeley had another president, I'm also sure the Berkeley league said, "We hardly know her, but go ahead!"

Morris: That's interesting because the years you were president, the San Francisco league was very strong, wasn't it, and had some very strong and very active members?

B. May: Yes. But they had lots of local projects to put forward and I had no opposition.

Morris: Has there ever been opposition? Have there ever been two candidates?

B. May: There have been people nominated from the floor of state convention and elected to the state board. I don't remember anyone being nominated as a rival candidate for president in the state league, but this happened in the national league. Miss [Anna Lord] Strauss was nominated from the floor and won the presidency.

Morris: Was she?

B. May: In the national league. The issue was again the reorganization of the League of Women Voters to make it more of a membership-participating organization than it had been in the past. She was still national president during the time that Mrs. Scheer and I, succeeding her, were California president. So, this is why we spent so much of our time on reorganization of the league.

Morris: Yes, I remember that she was national president in the late '40s. So, there was enough disagreement about reorganization that it really produced --

B. May: At first hearing it was a little difficult to understand, particularly in the West, where we thought we'd done quite well in large meetings with groups of experts who studied together

B. May: and then laid down the law to the rest of us. And, certainly, there was a split between the people who were exceedingly well informed and who wished to talk to governors and senators and assemblymen, rather than fellow members, though they didn't mind indoctrinating in large groups.

I remember the first state board on which I served, being demurely quiet in a new organization for a while. But finally a topic came along, which I thought I knew something about. It was the question of pasteurizing milk and I've forgotten the point, but I thought I had something to contribute then and I signaled the chairwoman that I wished to speak, whereupon the specialist in milk turned to me and said, "Oh, Bernice, do keep quiet! You know you don't know a thing about milk!" And I muttered, "Just as a drinker." [Laughter]

I appreciated the feeling of many members that they had the word handed down from either national or state board when instead they wanted the same kind of participation they had on local issues.

Morris: So, this handing down from on high didn't apply to local issues?

B. May: No, the local leagues ran their own show, although they had to do it within the principles that had been adopted by national and state leagues concerning civil rights, voters' rights, adherence to the basic charter and so on.

Morris: After the reorganization within the league, did you feel this made a difference in the effectiveness of individual league members or in the league's outreach?

B. May: I think its chief effect was that we were unable to carry as extensive a program, nevertheless the individual league member who attends unit and general meetings and participates in the league decisions knows more about her subject and is probably more effective in voter service, or in being able to discuss a league stand, either with other voters or with her representative in any governmental level. I think they are no longer either as interested in or as well versed in structure of government. The concern for legislative reform, the requirement that the league not support a measure unless they see how it can be financed, the requirement of merit system selection of personnel, is no longer as clear in the minds of the membership because, I think, there's less discussion of it.

B. May: Now, this may be part of a general trend and the merit system especially is under attack nowadays on almost all levels. As far as I know, there's been little or no league protest and I doubt if under league rules they could do it without restudying.

Morris: It's been quite a long time since the system was studied. The merit system's own rules and regulations have undoubtedly undergone a great deal of change.

B. May: Yes, though theoretcially, both nationally and in state and local governments, the principle remains the same: selection of personnel on the basis of qualifications to perform the tasks that they're being examined for; examinations open for entering classes to anyone who fulfills whatever minimum requirements are set up for the jobs; no discrimination. The issue of discrimination is going to be the one on which the coming battle, if it does come as I anticipate, will be fought, because the quota system is certainly a form of discrimination.

Morris: It seems to be, but the existing regulations and access to the merit system tests don't seem to have turned up what we would like to in the way of minority candidates who then get the jobs.

B. May: It may be that our schools and training are not adequate. You can't expect minority persons, who have not previously been admitted in sufficient numbers to professional schools, to be there when you want to appoint them to jobs, just because you say, "Look, they ought to be black," or, "They ought to be women." Everybody belongs to some minority.

While we're talking about volunteer agencies like the league, we should note that the '40s and '50s were a period of looking for communists in Hollywood, in the government, and in almost all organizations that made recommendations for change. The league was no exception, so that it was being questioned. Not that the league would dodge questions, but they felt strongly that the whole movement that we talk about as being McCarthyism was a national one and we stood on the national league's support of individual civil rights.

But it did come up again and again, for instance, in the matter of special oaths. The league opposed these on the basis that the constitution of the State of California had included the simple oath: "I pledge allegiance to the Constitution of the United States and the constitution of the State of California." And the constitution goes on to say, "...and no other oaths shall be required.

B. May: So, the league opposed special oaths, putting this opposition in its personnel policy and pointing out that it was not only an invasion of individual rights, but poor personnel policy to add unnecessary and complicated restrictions.

In general, the California league met this attack by placing its opposition to Red-baiting in the appropriate policy in regard to governmental activity and answered people who made vague accusations -- "Everybody knows she's a communist!" -- against league members, league officers, and public officials, whom people would have liked the league to move against, by saying, "When you have some evidences of overt action against the local or state government or within the league, bring it to us and we'll consult an attorney, but we're not going to respond to vague accusations."

Morris: Were there suggestions that some league board people were communists?

B. May: Yes, that they were communists or that their husband was a communist or whatnot. This tended, in a way, to divide -- well, this isn't strictly true, but it tended to divide the rural leagues from the urban leagues. It was a constant climate, which was very difficult to live in if you were studying and advocating change.

Much of the opposition to health insurance, for example, was based on the accusation that it was, if not communistic, socialistic. This came up again in regard to other fields of study and it came up in regard to, as I say, membership, local league officers, state officers, and none of us were quite sure how much this very unfavorable climate for free discussion was affecting viewpoints and decisions. It was an unhappy period.

It only finally began to let up when President Truman felt that there should be some moderating influence on this national movement. He encouraged the United States Civil Service Commission to appoint a board or, really, a series of boards for different areas to review cases of federal employees who were accused of subversive activity.

Ruth Scheer was appointed a member of the board for this locality, along with Mr. Philip Angell, who has always been a good friend, though not a league member.

Morris: He's always been a good supporter of the league, yes.

B. May: Mrs. Scheer, I think, was appointed in 1951 and served for the life of this committee, which was, I think, some seven years.

More on Regional Government

B. May: I would be loath to leave the league without pointing out that the League of Women Voters, north and south, centered around San Francisco Bay Area in the north and Los Angeles in the south, was one of the first citizen organizations to take on regional planning. This was done first by organizing county leagues, which had a brief and unsatisfactory life because the regional problems of mass transit, environmental quality, and employment were no more confined to county lines than they were to city lines. So, early in the '50s, the leagues, first in the north and then later in Los Angeles, organized separate league organizations related to the discussion of regional problems, and the support or opposition of regional issues. Local leagues send delegates from their boards to these regional leagues. The league has been effective in its support and opposition, though, like all organizations, not always.

They have supported most of the governmental agencies to consider environmental questions -- BCDC [Bay Conservation & Development Commission], Coast Commissions, as examples. They have considered and supported a regional government for the nine Bay counties, but only for a democratic structure which would include members elected to the decision-making body from comparatively small districts, districts no larger than an assembly district. That is why they are opposing, at the moment, Assemblyman Knox's bill AB 2040, which is being supported by the Association of Bay Area Governments, because it will leave the decision-making powers in the hands of councilmen and county supervisors, chosen by their fellow councilmen and supervisors, and, so, really remote from the voter.

Morris: Did the interest in regional planning start on the state board who took it to the local areas, or did the local people come to the board?

B. May: I think it was a local movement. It certainly was in this area, because we had a great concern for the increasing pollution of our environment and there was practically nothing a local league could do about it, as well as great concern for social problems, which spilled over local boundaries.

B. May: One of the difficulties which, as far as I know, the league has never faced is: What does it do to county government if you have a regional government? So, they have reacted to regional government plans, which have proliferated in the legislature, oh, certainly in the last ten years. The conflict of interest with the local elected officials is a very real one and yet, as one supervisor who was a minority on his board kept saying, "If you're a good supervisor, you haven't got time to be a member of a regional government and to carry on a business or your family life or any other activity."

I very much hope that this will be worked out. I think the success of Toronto, which has a regional government related, of course, to the core city is encouraging. The classic example is always the London County Council and the new structure centering around London, which is not exactly our situation because the London borough is larger than the whole city of Berkeley. So, I think that the size of the centers of population in the Bay Area has to be considered.

I think, eventually, a regional government with an elected body of, say, forty (which is what districts about half the size of assembly districts would set up) would be a workable instrument in which more citizens could participate in regional decisions. Hearings and discussions would be at hand in the region, rather than in Sacramento. It would offer the advantage, in a population in which many previously disadvantaged people would like to enter public life -- it would offer a new route to election for a variety of candidates.

Morris: Have you thought yourself about what might happen to, not only county government, but city government, to accommodate a regional government?

B. May: I think city government would not be greatly affected because the city has enough problems of its own within its boundaries and is powerless to do anything about the spillover of crime, unemployment, the development of the Bay to insure that there is room for trade and commerce and docks and, at the same time, public access and usefulness of the Bay. I think that cities would benefit, but not everybody agrees with me.

However, I'm proud of the league to have recognized this problem and to have begun working on it. In our supporting documents, I must put in a copy of the observation reports, because the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area observes all

B. May: of those agencies who are now making regional decisions which have been delegated to them by the state.

Morris: Okay. I think that lays the groundwork pretty well.

B. May: Yes. And I think you're probably right that we shouldn't take time to discuss the other types of volunteer agencies.

Morris: I think they may come in by the way. We've talked about most of them except for Travelers Aid and Family Service.

B. May: Good.

Morris: We haven't talked about how you managed to find time to put in a spell on the board of the Women's Faculty Club and on the board of Prytanean in the '40s.

B. May: Yes, but I think there's not enough direct relationship, except with those agencies who are trying to solve social problems in a variety of Bay communities, like Travelers Aid, to warrant a discussion of them, except perhaps to say that volunteer agencies seem to me to be providing two important kinds of services: one, those agencies that provide extra hands for hospitals and rehab centers and other agencies in which they use teaching and remedial skills, which preserves budgets, and also, I think, preserves a kind of freshness of approach, which many recipients of help appreciate.

The kind of organization in which I've spent more time is the volunteer organization that discusses a problem and hopes to bring about change, usually social change. There, I think, the volunteer agency has a peculiar advantage over the recommendations of staff or other experts; volunteers are not bound by a salary or by a job and they can say what they think, whether the establishment likes it or not, and this is a very valuable element.

Morris: Then these would be organizations that are the broad-scale issue agencies?

B. May: Or they may relate to one issue, one broad issue, like the Mental Health Association, of which I've been a member. Planning agencies in one field or another, like health advisory committees and so on.

VII THE ELECTIVE PROCESS IN BERKELEY

[Portions of this chapter were recorded on May 2, 10, 18, and 31, 1974. The transcript has been rearranged to provide a clearer narrative.]

Deciding to Run for Council

Morris: A couple of times you've commented that this is the way something looked to you from a political point of view. When did you first discover that you had a political mind?

B. May: In part, in the League of Women Voters. Maybe as a child from my father, who had a lifetime interest in issues, candidates, and the Republican party. Later from my husband, not a participant in party politics, but a consistent student of change, politics, and issues. In my own life, I became more active politically, as we've said earlier, in the long struggle to establish Asilomar. Another push, as with perhaps anyone who begins on the lowest level of politics, the pleasure when people asked me to run.

Morris: I take it that you enjoyed the experience with the kinds of negotiations that went into the Asilomar transfer to the state.

B. May: I enjoyed winning, but I would have enjoyed winning more if I hadn't had to pay the price of relinquishing any further contribution to Asilomar because I was not a member of the right party or, perhaps, was considered not only not a member of the right party, but too interested in the possibilities of change.

Morris: Was it the possibilities of change that appealed to you when you were asked to run for the city council?

B. May: Yes. I was asked to come to a meeting of a group of parents who were looking for possible candidates for the Berkeley board of education. The woman who talked to me presented it in a flattering light because she had worked with me on war training at the university and thought that I would be a good member of the board of education. I told her I doubted it because my own field was adult education. I knew something about the restrictions of the Education Code which hamper local planning. I also thought that being a stepmother was probably worse for a candidate than having no children at all. You know, the stepmother in folklore is ranked with landlords or ogres.

So, I said no and she said, "But maybe you'd change your mind if you heard us talk and thought about our questions." So I went to their meeting. The only other prospective candidate there was that brilliant, blind faculty member from the University of California campus, Jacobus tenBroek, who later became a member of the State Board of Social Welfare. He was no more interested in the local board of education than I was and we had fun laughing because he was concerned with services for the blind, I with adult learning, and what were we doing there?

So, after a pleasant evening and some cookies and coffee, we went home. The next morning, Jack Kent, who was with Arthur Harris one of a minority of two liberals on the Berkeley City Council, called to say, "I hear you might run for the board of education."

Morris: The news traveled fast.

B. May: Oh, you know, they do it with bongo drums. I said, "No, Jack. It's just not my field." Then he said, "Why don't you come and join Art and me on the council?"

I said, "I could talk it over."

He replied, "Oh, don't bother to talk too much. I'll send Babette over to see you. You and I can talk again later." So, he did. I also talked to Art and to a number of people who knew about the workings of city hall at the moment. I decided that whether I won or not, it would be an interesting thing to do.

I still feel this. I think there's no more exciting American experience than running for office, especially if you're not desperate about winning.

Morris: That's a good point.

B. May: Of course, this is what people always tell you. Philip Angell was one of the persons I consulted, because he had served for many years on the Berkeley Personnel Board. He had an entirely new viewpoint. He said, "Everybody will tell you, 'Don't run if you're afraid of losing.' They want you to be prepared for that. I want you to be prepared to win and sure that you want to win." He pointed out the pressures, the telephone calls, the relationship with voters, the many problems, including something of the problems in the current budget which starved service for people and for maintenance.

If I had it to do over again, I would have done more study of the city budget in advance.

Morris: Before you decided?

B. May: Before I decided, though I think I probably would have run anyway. Democrats were very encouraging. This was before a special shove from women behind women candidates and I got more practical advice, support, and, I must say, money from Berkeley men than I did from Berkeley women, though many women spent a lot of time telephoning, sending "Dear Friend" cards and addressing envelopes here at my house.

The Berkeley [Democratic] Caucus

B. May: Before we get any further, we must talk about the Berkeley Caucus, because they were part of my decision to run.

Morris: I would like to hear how they functioned.

B. May: At this time, the CDC, California Democratic Council, had done a fine organization job in Berkeley. There were a number of clubs whose members wished to support local candidates, but, of course, could not do so directly as part of the Democratic party structure. They put together the Berkeley Caucus which then supported Jack Kent.

Morris: When had he been elected?

B. May: He was elected two years before I was.

Morris: 1957?

B. May: Yes. The Caucus had a candidate selection process in which each club sent a voting representative for a given group of members. As I recall, it was one representative for every fifty, but it may have been another ratio. The people who were asked to appear before the Caucus agreed that if they were not chosen, they would not run in the current election -- a device to keep down the multiplication of competing liberal candidates, or what is now termed the death wish of the liberal.

The endorsing group was large enough to be truly representative because, as I recall it, there were twenty-five or so clubs in the Caucus.

Morris: In Berkeley? That's an incredible organizational --

B. May: Yes, it was, with real spirit. I was unknown to the group, except to a sprinkling of young Democrats who had been my husband's students and a few others, like Jack Kent, whom I'd known for a long time.

As I recall it, I appeared twice. Some decisions were made at the first meeting on platform. C.O. MacMillan and Dr. James Whitney were selected as candidates with the warm support of the Berkeley Young Democrats. Both these men had run for office before, had done fairly well, and the YD's felt they both should have support for another try.

Other clubs wanted time to consider whether to run only these two or to go for broke with the five needed to replace the vacancies on the council -- four expired terms including the vacancy left by Jeff Cohelan's election to Congress in November, 1958, and the two-year term resulting from the resignation of George Pettit. Hurford Stone had been appointed to replace him and so would run as an incumbent.

Some of the Caucus also wanted to be sure that there was a vacancy available for William T. "Zack" Brown (then out of town), who was a longtime member of various Berkeley Democratic clubs and the popular manager of the Co-op Federal Credit Union. Roy Nichols, who was the black pastor of Downs Memorial Methodist Church, and myself were also being considered. I've forgotten who else. So, we all came back and a slate of five was decided upon.*

---

*Arthur Harris, Bernice Hubbard May, C.O. MacMillan, Roy Nichols, Dr. James Whitney. Harris and May were elected. BHM

B. May: Some of us, like myself, who'd advocated black participation in community life and the integration of Berkeley, didn't want to appear to be running against a black liberal. However, Roy Nichols, because of the time limitations of his church assignment, said he wanted to be endorsed, if at all, for the two-year term.

It would have been easier, I think, to elect Roy in a field of candidates than by a direct campaign against a given white candidate, who was Dean Stone from the University of California. I'm sure some knowledgeable Caucus member pointed that out to Roy. But he knew that his church assignment might be up in two years and held to his choice.

Morris: Do you remember the Appomattox Club? It was a black political group, which I assumed was Democratic. Byron Rumford spoke about it as very helpful to him. It had been going since the '30s in Berkeley.

B. May: Then it had preceded CDC.

Morris: Yes, it would have, but I thought it might have become --

B. May: I'm not sure that it was Democratic. I don't remember hearing its name or seeing its representatives at the Caucus, though there were black participants there, a number from the South Berkeley Democratic Club which had both black and white members.

Morris: Mr. Rumford recalled that Tom Berkley and Frances Albrier had both run for the Berkeley City Council.

B. May: That was earlier. Tom did run and was defeated. There had been a series of black candidates who had run, but had never been elected without a wide political base. Black voters were not numerous enough to elect candidates without white support. Since they normally single-shotted for blacks [i.e. only voted for one candidate in a field] they had little strength to encourage white cooperation before the Berkeley Democrats made integration a major platform issue. Bill Sweeney was our first black councilman, elected with the help of the Caucus in 1961, two years after I was.

Anyway, at the second Caucus meeting, after Roy had cleared up one difficulty for me by saying he wanted to run for the two-year term, to everyone's surprise "Zack" Brown said that the Caucus had often discussed backing a black candidate and a candidate who was a woman.

B. May: He said, "I think 1959 is the year to do both. I think we might wait a long time before we got candidates with the advantage of such well-known names. I withdraw and ask those who were prepared to vote for me to endorse Mrs. May and Reverend Nichols."

I protested, but I also was grateful, because by now I'd been doing enough work on my proposals to want to see what I could do in the campaign.

Morris: Yes. I would think you would get more involved in it and it would become much more fascinating.

Campaigning in 1959: Getting Organized

B. May: Then the campaign began and the Caucus members were helpful, but on the whole, the candidate, at least for local office, has to dig up a committee and dig up ideas on his own. I did have lots of help from individual Caucus members.

League board members could do nothing directly for me, but their husbands could, and they were generous. You'll be amused to hear that George Scheer, who for years had been telling the league to be more conservative and, for heavens sakes, not to endorse the California Water Plan, forgave me for all those past league errors and promptly produced a slogan before we had an organization.

Morris: Is that where it came from? I was going to ask you.

B. May: "In April, Vote for May."

Morris: That's really a lovely one.

B. May: "What does it mean?" people asked. Just what it says. "But it has," somebody said, "this beautifully vague feeling of progress. I don't know what progress it is, but it will get talked about."

Morris: It's a very specific instruction: Our city elections are in April and in April, vote for May.

B. May: Yes. This slogan won me comment in Herb Caen's column. Also, as I drove around the city in the battered convertible that I had at the moment, boys collecting bumper strips would ride up beside me and say, "Got an extra? Got an extra?"

B. May: Thanks again, George -- every piece of my literature carried my slogan, even my letterheads and envelopes -- in all three campaigns.

Morris: Did you have an overall campaign coordinator?

B. May: Mrs. Owen Chamberlain, Babette Chamberlain, managed my first campaign. She now thinks I'm a little lukewarm on women. I'm not really; just not ecstatic at perpetuating sex as a prime factor in individual qualifications.

Morris: Who did the publicity and the advertising?

B. May: Dorothy Demorest. She tried to make ours different with scant funds. She's now gone into real estate, which seems a great loss of a special skill.

Morris: She has been considered a kind of a bellwether; whoever's campaign she's working on, you can usually figure is one of the better organized campaigns and is probably going to win.

B. May: She says she is tired of doing campaigns -- political or money-raising. She called me up early this year and said she'd passed her examination as a real estate broker. She, after all, had been writing political advertising for a long time and said, "It's harder to do the kind of campaign I'm interested in, under today's circumstances."

Morris: Did Babette recruit all of the precinct workers and whatnot?

B. May: No. We had a precinct chairman who, as I recall it, was John Killeen.*

Morris: I was thinking more of who carried the load, who helped you with planning and things like that.

B. May: The basic advance planning, I would say, Dorothy and Babette and I did, with some help from Art [Harris], and from Dr. Eugene Lee of IGS.

Morris: Art wasn't running that year?

---

*See next page. Mrs. May's extensive collection of campaign materials for 1959, 1963, and 1967 is in her papers in The Bancroft Library.

Committee to Re-Elect Bernice Hubbard May (1963)

656 Santa Barbara Rd.
Berkeley, California

CAMPAIGN CO-CHAIRMEN:
Dr. Marie Fielder
Robert Ratcliff
CAMPAIGN COORDINATOR:
Mrs. Albert Raeburn
CAMPAIGN CO-MANAGERS:
Mrs. Owen Chamberlain
Mrs. Wilmont Sweeney
TREASURER
Mr. Jay Gittelsohn
CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE
Mrs. Spurgeon Avakian
Mrs. Arlene Beckford
Mrs. William T. Brown
Mrs. John Carter
Mrs. Milton Chernin
Mrs. William F. Cody
Mrs. Evelyn Cornet
Mrs. Henry Ensler
Mr. Morris Freifeld
Mr. Varden Fuller
Miss Margaret Gee
Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Griffin
Mr. D. G. Gibson
Mrs. James Hart
Mr. I. Michael Heyman
Mr. Wesley E. Hester
Mrs. Paul Heyneman
Mrs. Bradley K. Holbrook
Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Hurwich
Mr. Robert P. Judd
Mrs. Frankie Jones
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Kasin
Mrs. T. J. Kent, Jr.
Mrs. Marge Leibenstein
Mrs. C. S. Lancaster
Mrs. Charles Larrance
Mr. and Mrs. Acie Lee
Mrs. Albert Lepawsky
Mr. Frank T. Lindgren
Mrs. Ramona Maples
Mrs. George Moncharah
Mrs. Margaret Miller
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Nisbet
Mrs. John Roda
Mrs. Joseph H. Siegfried
Mr. and Mrs. Tom Silk
Mrs. Earl J. Simburg
Mrs. Elizabeth Witkin Tarris
Mrs. Wayne Thornton
Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Welch
Mr. Sandy W. Wright
Mr. Delmar Williams
PARTIAL LIST OF SPONSORS
Mr. Philip H. Angell
Atty. Spurgeon Avakian
Mrs. John P. Austin
Mrs. Thomas Browne
Mr. Stanley Erle Brown
Mr. Bert Bartholomew
Irving D. Berg, M.D.
Prof. David Blackwell
Mrs. Kristine Belt
Prof. Owen Chamberlain
Hon. Jeffery Cohelan
Mr. Julian H. Cohn
Mr. T. K. Cleveland
Mrs. Florence Casaroli
Mrs. Rupert Crittendon
Rev. Laurance L. Cross
Mrs. Enoch Dumas
Mr. David C. Dunlap
Mr. Cole W. Gilliam
Prof. Robert A. Gordon
Mrs. Marion Sproul Goodin
Mrs. Margaret S. Hatfield
Mrs. Winifred O. Heard
Mr. John D. Holstrom
Mr. Harry L. Kingman
Prof. I. Michael Lerner
Prof. Alexander Meiklejohn
Harold Mankin, M.D.
Donald A. Macfarlane, M.D.
Mr. Bob McNary
Rev. Roy Nichols
Prof. Peter Odegard
Mr. Walter E. Packard
Atty. Henry Poppic
Mr. David T. Russell
Hon. Byron Rumford
Mr. George B. Scheer
Prof. Mark Schorer
Mrs. Carol Sibley
Rev. Edward Stovall
Atty. Wilmont Sweeney
J. M. Stratton, M.D.
Rev. W. H. Sypert
Prof. Raymond Sontag
Rev. F. Marion Smith
Rev. H. P. Schaeffer
Mr. Robert G. Sproul, Jr.
Mr. Yoshio Takakuwa
James G. Whitney, M.D.
Mrs. Charlotte Treutlein
Dr. Eiichi Tsuchida
Mrs. Catherine Bauer Wurster
Mr. Mas Yanamura
Mr. Henry S. Yee

1959

Campaign Manager
Mrs Owen Chamberlain

Campaign Coordinator Mrs Albert Raeburn

Sponsor Chairman Mrs T. J. Kent

Calendar Chairman Mrs ~~Elaine~~ Henry Ensler

Finance Chairman Mrs Frankie Jones
Robert Ratcliffe

Treasurer Wm T. 'Zack' Brown

Political Coordinator Daniel Langacre

Public Relations Mrs Dorothy Dellinger

Newspaper Publicity Mrs Albert Lepawsky

Precinct workers John Killeen (Sp)

Special Events Mrs ~~Edith~~ Gerald Kasin

Committee Members

40-50 men and women who served on sub-committees or came to work parties for addressing or telephoned to follow up finance and other appeals —

IN APRIL VOTE FOR MAY

Vote for a Better Berkeley

BERNICE HUBBARD MAY

will represent YOU!

WE NEED NEW CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS
WHO WILL WORK FOR THE GOOD OF
ALL BERKELEY

- Endorsed by: Alameda County Council on Political Education, AFL-CIO.
- Bay District Joint Council of Building

Your Support Will Help Elect

BERNICE HUBBARD MAY

to the

Berkeley City Council

You Can Use My Name as a Sponsor

for BERNICE HUBBARD MAY

Name_____

Address_____

It's APRIL
VOTE for MAY
Elect Bernice Hubbard May
Berkeley City Council—April 7

If you would like to help in ony woy, let us know.

The
Berkeley Committee
for Representative Government

unanimously recommends the following independent candidates for City Council:

(full term)

ARTHUR HARRIS
—incumbent

BERNICE HUBBARD MAY
—administrator

C. O. McMILLAN
—attorney

JAMES G. WHITNEY, M.D.
—physician

(short term)

ROY NICHOLS
minister

May Time All Year Around

WE ARE VOTING for MRS

BERNICE HUBBARD MAY

for **CITY COUNCIL**

(full term)

So right for Berkeley!

Yes, I endorse **Bernice Hubbard May**
for City Council in the April 7 Election

Name .....

Address .....

Phone .....

Occupation .....

☐ I will also contribute to he

Yau Con Call on Me Ta

☐ Phone

IN APRIL VOTE FOR MAY
832 SHATTUCK AVENUE
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94707

IN
APRIL
VOTE FOR
MAY

In APRIL VOTE FOR MAY

In April
VOTE for MAY
City Council (full term)
Election, April 7

In April Vote for MAY
832 Shattuck Ave.
Berkeley, Cal. 94707

Vote for May

B. May: He was running, but if we got into a difficulty, I could consult him, though he might not wish to be responsible for all of the things we did.

Dorothy Demorest also came from Cal Berkeley and the Daily Cal staff. She was a tremendous help in introducing me to the care that one must take in the choice of the effective words to describe an issue or a recommendation. There are words that turn people off and words for the same idea that are more readily acceptable.

Morris: Would you tell me a little more about Dorothy Demorest's advice?

B. May: Mrs. Demorest pointed out that in a democracy, discussion of issues or plans should aim at the widest possible consensus. To secure the support of the greatest possible number of voters, the advocate or candidate should be friendly and open minded rather than authoritarian or doctrinaire. Emphasize possible benefits rather than possible unpleasant results. For example, say 'mental health' rather than 'control of mental disorders,' 'adversary' rather than 'enemy,' 'open space' rather than 'vacant' or 'tax-free' land, 'administrator' instead of 'bureaucrat.'

One should also make the change in acceptable terms in districts or with time. In the 1960s I heard with pleasure a supporter call me "our great lady." Today that would be unacceptable to me and to most Democrats.

Morris: Have you still got some of your campaign material?

B. May: I have every scrap of it.

Morris: Good!

B. May: I have for each of my three campaigns a large grocery carton which includes everything we got out, successful or not.

The first steps in setting up a campaign were to secure sponsors for my filing papers and to enlist committee chairmen who could collect campaign funds, recruit a committee, plan and order literature, enlist many more sponsors to lend their names to my campaign, and arrange house meetings and public appearances for the candidate.

In the 1961 sponsor list of twenty, you'll recognize many names. There are for example four well-known black Berkeleyans.

Morris: I see D.G. Gibson and Frankie Jones.

B. May: And Byron Rumford and Reverend Edward Stovall.

Morris: Was this also an effort to balance Republicans and Democrats?

B. May: There are a few Republicans but we didn't make a great effort to enlist them. Republican names were used for the longer lists on publications.

In addition to the chairmen, some forty to fifty committee members worked in each campaign. It's good to remember that many of my supporters worked in all my campaigns -- a source of pride and great support to me.

Morris: What kinds of literature did you put out?

B. May: Our campaign materials followed models used successfully in preceding liberal campaigns without special appeals for me as a woman. Since all three campaigns used similar methods I'll send the materials used in 1959, 1963, and 1967 to The Bancroft for those who may be interested in details, together with partial files of samples collected from 1961, 1965, 1969, and 1971 -- the year of the radicals.

In a brown notebook in the 1959 file, there is a running account of what we did and what we might change in another campaign.*

Morris: Oh, good!

B. May: It includes the proposed budget and the actual budget and then just tidbits that were kept. I entered meetings that I went to. I listed the large meetings by the sponsoring organization and also by whether I spoke or circulated, as at a college tea. You can get a lot of individual exposure at non-political events.

Then, I also listed the house meetings by the street address because I thought if anybody really took a look at the campaign --

Morris: It would give an idea of the coverage in the various parts of town.

---

*This notebook is a treasure of practical advice on campaigning. Ed.

B. May: The house meetings, by the addresses, follow the pattern of my largest vote -- the north Berkeley hills, the flats, and the black community. I spoke at forty-four house meetings to estimated audiences totaling 950. I also spoke at eleven large meetings, PTA, candidates meetings and so on, to audiences totaling 1,700 (estimated).

In 1963 (fair housing) I went to too many meetings to list or record audiences -- four or five meetings on week days and perhaps seven or eight on Sundays and Saturdays. Meetings were larger than in 1961 and talkative, even noisy. Some news reports said meetings were rude and jeering. I didn't feel that but did find it hard to leave -- they could have talked all night.

Expenses and Accounts

Morris: What about campaign funds?

B. May: I've made a chart of our campaign contributions and expenditures for 1959, 1963, and 1967. Our method of budgeting was simple, even childish. We aimed the finance campaign and telephone follow-up to cover the essential literature. If any money was left over after printing and postage bills were paid, or came in after the literature had been mailed, we spent the overage on newspaper and/or radio advertising.

We managed all three years without deficits although the finance workers usually had to appeal to friends or family members for help on the very last bills. I gave only minor sums. I wanted to be elected for what I could contribute as a person rather than as a source of disposable income.

My total budget and my total contributions in 1959 were about $2,750 and that includes the efforts of my family who made up a small deficit. Otherwise, we would have had to have some kind of a money-raiser after election.

Morris: Did you do your fund raising primarily by a letter asking for funds, or did you have fund-raising events?

B. May: The letter, with a vigorous telephone follow-up. I didn't have fund-raising events, but benefited by those that were given by the Berkeley Caucus. The Democratic club members of the Young Democrats gave a cocktail party at which Alan Cranston, then

May Campaign Expenditures

	1959	1963	1967
Candidate's filing fee	$ 35.-	$ 35.-	$ 35.-
" travel, headquarters	—	—	—
Rent - public meetings	—	—	12.-
Personnel - advertising & publicity	168.12	—	150.-
Music	—	—	25.-
Posters, printing & distribution	—	—	509.62
Direct mail, printing postage, handbills	1,916.75	2,817.56	3,455.-
Newspaper advertising	601.32	1,174.54	499.50
Radio	—	362.-	268.-
Office Supplies	28.64	120.55	262.28
Photography, cuts and work	—	17.35	65.-
Petty Cash purchases -	—	—	120.37
Total	$ 2,749.83	4,527.-	5,399.77

B. May: state controller, spoke. They made money on that, some of which they spent directly in the campaign.

Morris: You mean on a Caucus mailing or Caucus ads?

B. May: Yes. Then, because the criticism that we weren't being nonpartisan was raised, they formed a Citizens' Committee for Representative Government. I found a short penciled note of their expenditures entered in the brown book. They paid for a sound truck, which I didn't want, but which the school board candidates did. CRG raised $1,150 and paid for a sound truck in selected precincts, a slate card for Democratic precinct workers, and then contributed $90 each to endorsed council candidates.

I also, before I got to these more serious topics, put in the record the only verse that I received during the --

Morris: Someone wrote a poem about your campaign?

B. May: Someone wrote -- the Easter Bunny wrote a poem, the last verse ending "This bunny's a flop, but when squeezed she'll say, IN APRIL VOTE FOR MAY."

Morris: [Laughter] Oh, that's marvelous!

B. May: These documents, the candidate's statements, will give the total donations and total expenditures for my three campaigns.

Morris: Looking through this list of contributors most of the donations are ten and fifteen dollars a few twenty, and just --

B. May: The largest, I think, is $300 or $350, in 1963 and $500 in 1967.

Morris: There's one of those, and then there's $100 from a physician in town known for his interest in good government, and one for $225. So, most of it is ten and fifteen dollars.

B. May: That's the story of my political career. I think this is the sound way, especially for local candidates: to encourage a great many small contributions.

That isn't really accurate; what we want to do is to encourage lots of contributions and not to look scornfully at even dollar contributions. You'll find on that list that there are dollar contributions which were sent in with name and address and which received just the same kind of thank-you note. Well, maybe the $350 thank you was a little warmer.

Morris: I should think so.

B. May: But each dollar gift commits the contributor to become a participant in city decision making -- if only as a critic.

Seeking Endorsements

Morris: How about endorsements besides the Caucus, individual supporters and other organizations?

B. May: Well, COPE was one of my endorsers; in 1959 they got out a leaflet for me. I was also endorsed by the Teamsters.

Morris: You were? Did you go and speak to their groups?

B. May: Yes. I spoke first at the regular meeting of COPE AFL-CIO, which was a committee made up largely, but not entirely, of business agents of the AFL-CIO unions.

Morris: You mean that the COPE committee is the business agents usually?

B. May: It's the political arm of the AFL-CIO in this county and, while not always the case, many of the delegates are business agents free to come to daytime meetings. They have a very good procedure, for endorsements. Candidates are given a specific appointment to answer the questions, which you do not know in advance.

One of my committee, Dan Longacre told me of some of the issues that were always of interest to unions, that I might do well to think over before I appeared. One of these was did I support the right of public employees to form unions or to join them and did I support the right of public employees to strike -- all one question. My answer was that I did support the right of public employees to form unions to negotiate conditions of work and wages and so on. But instead of the right to strike, I supported a procedure, agreed upon in advance, which would involve mediation or, if need be, arbitration as a final step, but that these were not to be considered if there were a strike. They said, "Do you really mean it?" I said, "Yes, I do mean it."

I remember somebody laughed and said, "why, you sound like the Institute of Labor Relations!" I've forgotten other tough ones. There were several questions about support for legislation

B. May: backing up the local residents in seniority against the union member with greater seniority from the outside. It seemed to me primarily a union question, but that I certainly would consider any specific proposal from a union if I were elected.

Morris: For a local ordinance?

B. May: For a local ordinance. It seemed to me offhand that seniority was primarily a matter for the unions to decide.

Morris: Internally?

B. May: Yes. I was endorsed first by COPE and then by the Council of Building Service Employees; that endorsement followed without asking me to appear again.

Morris: Who had made the contact for you with the -- ?

B. May: Oh, I made it.

Morris: You did? You just called up and said, "I'm a candidate; I'd like your endorsement."

B. May: Yes. I said I would like to be considered for endorsement. COPE, I think, lets anybody who wants to be considered appear. I appeared each time, each campaign, and was endorsed, I am proud to say.

Then, I've forgotten whether it was Bob Ash or Dick Groulx who was running that first appearance.

Morris: Bob Ash was head of the Central Labor Council at that point, I believe.

B. May: Yes, and Dick Groulx succeeded him later.

As I recall it, COPE contributed to my 1959 campaign by preparing and paying for printing of one leaflet and by statements appearing in various labor journals. Of course, we always used a union printer. The unions did not make direct monetary contributions with the exception of the Building Service Employees who sent me $100.

Later the IWLU endorsed me and provided news stories especially in labor papers. They endorsed local candidates by balloting at a membership meeting at which we spoke briefly on our aims in seeking office.

Campaign Materials and Strategy

Morris: Did COPE also distribute their flyer?

B. May: Yes. The leaflet on my COPE endorsement was distributed at union meetings and then they gave us a supply to use as an extra, because we had very little material and not much money.

Each year one of our mailers was The Berkeley Democrat, which may have done us more harm than good because it enabled the Republicans to publish a nonpartisan list made up of all Republicans, oddly enough, and claim that we were trying to inject partisanship into city affairs. The Democrat was written and published by a group of active Democrats, with Mary Kent as editor. It brought to all registered Democrats in Berkeley detailed information on candidates and issues. It was financed by some advertising but largely by payments from candidates for council and school board. In 1959 the May campaign paid $100 for the Democrat's support.

Then there are many newspaper clippings that I couldn't resist saving.*

Morris: This is the item in Herb Caen's column, commenting on your bumper strip, "In April Vote for May." That's worth a lot of doorbell ringing, isn't it, one mention in his column?

B. May: Yes. In my next campaign, 1963 -- the Fair Housing year -- Herb was more than generous, with two items in March.

> "If the press releases for Councilwoman Bernice Hubbard May, running for re-election in Berkeley, seem especially high-flown, it's because they're being written by Josephine Miles, Cal's noted avant garde poetess."
>
> And "The four liberal candidates in the forthcoming Berkeley election, all of whom support the Fair Housing Ordinance decided against running as a slate -- Put their names together and you get Harris May Stripp Dewey."

Two clippings are stories that were written after election, one in the San Francisco News and one in the Oakland Trib, neither of whom had given me much publicity. But they represent the difference in tone in stories about women, a tone that still goes on, and nowadays I would refuse to give a recipe.

---

*See Mrs. May's papers in The Bancroft Library.

Morris: This is the Oakland Tribune continuing column called "She Also Cooks."

B. May: I don't know whether it was a continuing column, or whether that was the head for this particular story.

Morris: Yes. And they're both on the women's page.

What impresses me about your campaign is that it sounds like it all went smoothly.

B. May: Since it was my first campaign, I didn't know if it was going smoothly or not.

We didn't have enough money to do everything we wanted to do. Addressing now has been greatly simplified by automation. The registrar of voters will run, down at the county, the addresses directly on your literature for so much a precinct and you don't have to have the whole city addressed if you can't pay for it. But the addressing and mailing cost is very high; that's the biggest single item, to cover all voters.

Morris: So, you did do a citywide mailing?

B. May: We got precinct lists and hand-addressed as many precincts as we could. The people experienced from other campaigns were helpful in selecting the areas. If you want to save money, you omit the campus precincts, because students as a whole don't vote unless there is some issue which particularly engages their attention, or some candidate who particularly engages their emotions. Student housing areas are low voting areas.

In precincts where conservative votes predominate and if you're a Democrat interested in change, that may also be a place for you to save money.

Morris: I would assume that you didn't go and knock on doors in those kinds of precincts, either.

B. May: No, except for some special spots that a precinct worker had suggested.

I frequently visited business districts. For instance, I walked Sacramento Street and the adjoining streets and talked to the proprietors and customers. But, if you can afford it, it's better to cover the whole district by mail as well.

Morris: Who was your best source of advice on these strategic matters, such as which precincts were more likely to be inclined toward you?

B. May: At that time, there were several people in the Democratic clubs who kept records and who were interested in the way precincts behaved. Mrs. Chamberlain was one of them as was Jack Hull.

Morris: And perhaps Al Raeburn?

B. May: Since he was a professional campaign manager on a fee basis, Al wasn't on my committee. His wife, Adele, was very effective. After I had proven myself electable, Al gave me valuable advice, often in the form of shrewd questions on issues.

Morris: Had somebody done some research for you that black letters on a yellow ground for the bumper sticker were particularly effective?

B. May: Yes. Dorothy Demorest looked up studies in PR journals. Black and yellow was not only economical, since you didn't have to pay for colored ink, but legible at a greater distance than black on white.

Morris: Were bumper stickers much in use?

B. May: The craze for them was really just beginning in 1959 and many people collected them.

Morris: I've heard it said that you can get some indication of how an election is likely to go by counting the stickers actually on bumpers.

B. May: I think you could, up to about 1969, but then people began saying to one another, "Now, if you have a bumper sticker on, they'll come along and tear it off and kick your fender in." Whether or not cars suffer damage, I don't know. The last time I had a bumper strip on my own car was for Bill Sweeney and nothing strange happened, except my car has a corrugated bumper and the strips don't stay on.

After I had lost a couple of Bill's, I put the strip on with tape in the back window of my car. As I was coming up one day in the heavy traffic on Ashby Avenue, I could hear someone behind me blasting his horn, just blasting it. I looked around and my dog Tibby was busy tearing down Bill's strip and it was Bill!

Morris: [Laughter] Oh, dear. He was the one behind you.

B. May: When I turned on Roble Road, I looked back to see and here he was, tooting and waving. Later he telephoned, "What do you mean, training that dog to eat my literature!"

Morris: Oh, that's marvelous.

Meeting Voters

B. May: A great help and support were the house meetings and the meetings in churches that were arranged in the black community.

Morris: Who was your chairman in charge of contacts with the black community?

B. May: We didn't have a separate one; ours was an integrated committee. Among the people who were very helpful to me this first time around were Mrs. Frankie Jones --

Morris: Was this your first acquaintance with her?

B. May: Yes, it was. I went to call on her to talk to her about her support before my final decision to run, at D.G. Gibson's suggestion. Mrs. Jones later planned good series of house meetings in the black community.

Their questions and their interest and their concern for what Art and Jack and I were planning to do was heartening. In this campaign, we didn't team up as a formal slate because Art Harris, who'd been the only Democratic member of the council for many years --

Morris: He was the one who broke the ice, as it were.

B. May: He had been elected as a young man just out of college and then was away in the Navy during World War II and reelected at the first opportunity. When he finally retired, in 1967, he'd served some twenty-eight years.

Morris: Good heavens!

B. May: Art had been delighted when Jack Kent came to join him on the council. When I was elected, we had a very good time because we were now enough to count -- three have to be heard. We often had fun making recommendations, without having to take the hard bumps of seeing how they worked when they went into practice.

B. May: But Art didn't believe in slate campaigns, so that we didn't have joint literature or too much in the way of planned joint house meetings, with the exception of those for Roy Nichols, Jim Whitney, and myself. Roy and I agreed from the beginning that one of our first concerns was integration in Berkeley. We tried to get our chairmen for house meetings working together and did, so that we spoke to many groups together.

I learned new things. In the meetings in white homes, you had contribution cards available to be picked up discreetly or you'd say, "Please mail them in." In the black homes, chairmen were much more direct. One of the things to say when you're taking up a collection is, "I don't want to hear your money; fold it."

Morris: Bills and not change, yes.

B. May: The food in black homes was always lovely -- no grocery cookies. Food is one of the perils for women candidates. I gained pounds and pounds and pounds campaigning and also serving on the council. I expected to give my time, but I was a little surprised that I gave my figure, too!

The meetings in Negro churches were a joy and a great experience. These were even more heartening in my second campaign when we were defending the fair housing ordinance, but characteristic, too, of 1959 -- talk to an audience which in a very free and easy, but not interrupting, way responds with "Amen!" or "Tell them, sister!" and sometimes a quotation from a prayer or the Bible. It's an accompaniment of warmth and approval -- or reproach.

Morris: Was this during Sunday service?

B. May: As the minister of the church decided. There was one black minister who refused in 1959 to have Roy and myself appear in his church, but the next campaign he was willing to have Art and me come. But he said, "You'll speak after the service." We went to the service first, of course, and at its end, the pastor said, "We've invited two good friends of our community to speak to us today and I know they're going to talk chiefly about fair housing. You know that I think affairs of the world do not belong in the sanctuary, so I'm going to ask everybody to get up and move into the Sunday school room. Will the deacons stand at the back by the doors so that no one will be confused? If they'll stand at the doors and direct everybody to -- ."

Morris: [Laughter] That's marvelous. So nobody could go away?

B. May: That meeting was a marvelous one. I'm sure you've heard Arthur Harris speak. He's not only a good speaker, but he has a ranging musical voice, to which people respond. The congregation at once began encouraging him with shouts of various kinds. I was sitting there thinking, "Oh, how am I going to beat that?" But they were as kind to me as they were to him.

Morris: What a nice experience.

B. May: A great experience. After that fair housing election was over and we knew we'd lost fair housing, I went to two or three meetings that happened spontaneously down along Sacramento Street where black people who worked on the campaign were talking about it. Many of them in tears.

Morris: When it lost?

B. May: Yes. But it was marvelous to come in and, instead of their saying, "If you'd campaigned harder, if you'd only been smarter, you ought to have been able to do that for us," no, they just stood me up on a chair to be seen and cried and congratulated me on my re-election. Everybody was crying, me too.

Morris: Was this election night?

B. May: Yes. I still grieve at the change in climate, because this wouldn't happen now.

Morris: If it lost, we wouldn't grieve?

B. May: I think if it lost, a white councilman who had been advocating something very much wanted by blacks would be criticized and reviled, rather than being greeted with love and affection and people saying, "You did the best you could and we're glad you're elected."

Morris: "And we'll do something; we'll go on."

B. May: "We'll pick ourselves up later."

Then, to get back to the first election, we did work hard and the election was close. This is one of the elections which led me to believe strongly that we should have for Berkeley the kind of election requirement that San Jose has, that one of the candidates who run in a field must receive 50 percent plus one of the votes cast, or a runoff must be held. If you will look at the returns for many Berkeley elections with today's multiplicity

B. May: of candidates -- even in those milder times with only ten or twelve candidates -- there are candidates elected on much less than 50 percent, usually not even in the high forties. In the 1973 city election (not the recall), the new members of the council were all elected by votes in the low 30 percents. No mandate there.

I think it's a wise precaution to require 50 percent of the vote plus one. You've probably noticed that Mrs. Janet Gray Hayes, a San Jose league member who's been serving on the council in San Jose, is running for mayor this year [1974] to replace Mayor Norman Mineta, who is running for Congress. So many people are running that it's predicted that a runoff will be needed to decide the mayor's race, to comply with the 50 percent plus one.

Morris: Is this a recent requirement in San Jose, or has it been part of their election procedure for some time?

B. May: This is a longtime provision in their charter, though I think it was a charter change, not part of their original charter. San Jose has done a good deal of charter revision. They once had, for example, a requirement that the voters give a confirming or dissenting vote to the city manager in every general election. So, O.W. Campbell, city manager of San Jose (later the manager for Dade County), told them that if they didn't repeal that provision that he would resign at the next election. They didn't, and he did.

Morris: Was that a strategic move? He didn't expect them to --

B. May: He was not willing to be city manager under political control. City professional staff shouldn't be elected or confirmed by the voters. Managers relate to the council and the council must bear the responsibility for choosing the city manager. It was no trouble to O.W. Campbell. He could easily get another job, you know.

Good city managers are still few and far between, as you can see by Berkeley in 1973. When a new council had been elected in part on opposition to expert management, Bill Hanley had many offers. He was unwilling to leave the City of Berkeley until the council had a legal budget, a responsibility the council was wishy-washy over. But as soon as they passed a budget, Hanley was off and away at a higher salary.

We had an excellent device to coordinate our campaigns promoted by Jack Kent. Caucus candidates and their managers met

B. May: for lunch once a week. Do you remember Betty Witkin,who was a strong party worker?

Morris: Yes.

B. May: She said she was too tied up with Democratic politics to be working for any of us, but she'd give us luncheon at her home. We paid some trivial sum and that girl was an absolutely inspired cook. D.G. [Gibson] came and the first time I saw D.G. Gibson eating gazpacho, I longed for a movie camera! He, you know, was a wonderful old sport. He just ate it right down -- made no trouble about Spanish soul food.

Morris: Whose campaign was he working on?

B. May: He was counseling all of us. After all, he was one of the first I'd consulted about running and his advice was sound. It certainly launched me and, I suspect, others. I don't think D. G. had much hope for me and he was as surprised as anybody when I was elected. But D.G. was willing to take a chance on a woman.

Then other interested Democrats dropped in from time to time for the luncheons. I remember local judges came quite often. We'll omit their names because judges don't care to be affiliated with political activity, but they often had good off-the-cuff advice. Of course, the managers were there and brain-stormed on stands and the response of various people to various stands. It was delightful for me because I was free as a bird. I didn't expect to be elected; I just thought this was an interesting spring's occupation.

Morris: [Laughter]

B. May: No, really! I didn't -- I worked hard, but it was a good time in my life for me to be having distraction and I was grateful for it win or lose. My husband, you see, had died in '55. I had been in Europe in '58 to visit the University of Bologna, where we were going at the time of Sam's death.

I saw the people he knew there, including some of the Italian students I had met who'd been sent to the University of California while Bologna was readying its school of public administration. Earlier Sam had surveyed the leading universities in Italy, those the Italian government had selected as possibilities for a school of public administration. This was one of the projects under the Marshall Plan.

Morris: Was it? A very fine one, I should think.

B. May: After Sam had made the survey, the Marshall planners said to him, "How would you like to go back to Bologna and set up the school?" So, we had expected to be in Bologna for three years. Dr. Milton Chernin was the director on a one-year basis in 1958, and he and Gertrude invited me to come over. I stayed two months in Bologna and did a little running around before and after my visit. But, as you can see, I needed to do something solid in 1959.

Morris: Yes, make a new start.

B. May: I didn't anticipate getting into twelve years. But I thought campaigning would give me a change in pattern. I'll be working with new people, new tasks and, if not elected, I'll be ready to think of another plan. I think my committee were surprised that they elected me, too.

Morris: Did you have any real trouble spots, either of personal antagonism or of kinds of questions you weren't able to cope with?

B. May: Certainly there were questions that I couldn't answer adequately. I didn't know enough as a newcomer to municipal affairs. I remember a searching question on budget at an early house meeting when I had not studied the general concepts of the Berkeley city budget. I didn't know how much of the budget dollar, even in thousands was allocated to this and that; I just knew the total. I thanked the man for his question and said I would look it up. I didn't have the budget with me, but I was embarrassed because I should have known its general allocations.

In the 1959 campaign, as I recall it, the greatest resistance on issues that I met was to expansion of public land in Berkeley for parks and open space. I never felt any personal hostility until the next campaign when the fair housing ordinance was up on referendum at the same time.

Morris: Did you get much opposition when you were campaigning?

B. May: The first campaign seemed to me in retrospect very peaceful, but of course I was opposed. Much of the opposition that I remember came because I had chosen a year to run when the popular councilwoman --

Morris: Lee Breckinridge Thomas?

B. May: Mrs. Thomas was running and I had a great deal of questioning and many telephone calls saying, "Why are you opposing Mrs. Thomas?" I pointed out that we didn't run against individual candidates, but in a field, that Mrs. Thomas herself had run in the field before against other women, and Berkeley had once had three women serving on its council at one time. But this didn't convince them. They felt that Mrs. Thomas was well known and able. I found it better to answer politely and not to point out that Mrs. Thomas' views and mine would frequently be quite different.

Later, during the council fight over mental health I am sure Mrs. Thomas' sponsors felt justified because Mrs. Thomas opposed it bitterly and vigorously while I supported the new service, as strongly as I could.

Morris: Were the objections that there should only be one woman on the council, that it was all right to have a token woman, but there shouldn't be more than one woman?

B. May: No, I think this was personal loyalty to Mrs. Thomas, backed by conservative feeling in regard to my views, which were well known to be much more liberal than Mrs. Thomas'. In fact, before the third election when I was running (1967), I happened to meet Mrs. Thomas, who was a good friend and very witty, on the street and stopped to chat. She then had moved out of Berkeley. "Oh," she said, "Bernice, isn't this awful, this election! The leftists who are running! Why, you know, my dear, I have to tell everybody to vote for you!"

Babette Chamberlain had participated in a number of campaigns and had good ideas. One of the things she did with great care was to select two sample groups of precincts that were comparable in type of housing, income level, and other census data. Both were racially mixed areas. In one of them I did nothing and in the other I called on every house. After it was over, the vote totals came out just about same. I had worked myself to a frazzle in one and we got practically the same vote in the other.

Morris: I have always wondered how much difference the anguished doorbell ringing and personal contact makes. In other words, could you be elected just on the basis of the material that goes out in the voters' pamphlet from the city clerk's office?

B. May: I don't think you could do it on the voters' pamphlet alone, although it is in Berkeley the most telling campaign aid, since it reaches every voter with his ballot. I believe a charge by

B. May: the city for printing costs is a help to the serious prospective candidate by giving him an early test of the readiness of his supporters to contribute reasonable campaign expenses. A charge cuts down the number of candidates on ego trips with no serious support or purpose. I really am not sure that (except perhaps in carefully selected neighborhoods where you feel that your viewpoint has been supported, but the vote hasn't been large enough in the past) it is worthwhile to go house to house.

I consulted a friend of mine who'd been engaged in state campaigns. He said, "Don't ring doorbells unless you've got a publicity stunt going, so that you'll be written up kissing the pretty baby, or doing this and that." But we didn't have that kind of access to reporters and photographers, so we rang the doorbells, as many as we could in selected areas. You haven't lived politically if you haven't rung doorbells. The things that occur are startling, though maybe I was remarkably naive. Someone always went with me, of course, and when I went in the evening to ring doorbells, this was always a man.

One very pleasant man who went with me many times was shy, well mannered and very careful of speech. I think some of the episodes were harder on him than they were on me. One hot night we were plodding down a street and the door to the next house was open. We rang the doorbell, a brawny young hero came to the door, and all he would have had to do was to take off his underpants and he could have streaked! In '59, this did seem a little informal.

"Well," he said, "Come on in folks! Take off your clothes!" [Laughter] We could see in the rear that his wife was ironing and she was as stripped down as he.

Qualifications

Morris: I think that gives quite a good picture of how you put a campaign together. What did you feel were your strongest qualifications for this job you set out to win?

B. May: [Pause for thought.] I would say a variety of experiences with public affairs, a very strong conviction in regard to the attainment of an integrated society -- in this, I think, we were all sincere, those of us who worked for it so many years, but we were not realistic in estimating the difficulty of what we were proposing and the depth and extent of covert racism.

B. May: Then, I had time. I was perfectly willing at that stage in my life to give as much time as was required or turned out to be useful, to me at any rate, and I hope to the council. And a long, sustained interest in the processes of government. I had little experience in public finance, but I had had experience with fairly large budgets and with budgets that were subject to public review.

Morris: Yes. This was the United Crusade budget panels?

B. May: No, the university, essentially the university extension and ESMWT budgets, which were large, but not as large as the city budget of 10 million or so in the 1950s or as comprehensive.

I think concern for the structure of government, for public finance and also for the restrictions and the support given officials at any level by the provisions of the law were characteristics which were advantageous. Also I did have a well-known name and I was a Berkeley product. I'm sure many people voted for me because they had a vague sense of familiarity with the name.

Morris: Voters responded to your being a home-town girl and were not sure whether you were you or your husband?

B. May: Yes. I'm sure they didn't think I was my husband, but his name reenforced mine with many.

Morris: It's a good name.

B. May: Yes. But name recognition, there's no doubt of it, is very important.

To one of the doorbells I rang, a woman answered and said, "Oh, I haven't got time to talk to you, but I always vote," and closed the door. It's that kind of voter who distresses the League of Women Voters, the one who votes, informed or not.

Morris: You wonder if somebody who has that kind of attitude has their mind made up in the beginning of a campaign?

B. May: They may. You have to do as much as you can on as many different levels as you can and then let it ride.

Statements on Issues

B. May: This is a folder of drafts of statements that I made on various topics. I thought we might go through this and pick out the issues which seemed to be chiefly in people's minds during the campaign itself.

Morris: That would be marvelous. I think they probably all should be saved. Those are your working papers.

B. May: I never thought these would be of any interest to the university, or I would have written more neatly.

Here is the 1959 League of Women Voters' questionnaire for candidates.

Morris: And they were asking what?

B. May: [Reads from questionnaire.] "What do you think are the three most urgent problems facing city government?" And Mrs. May said, "The overall pressing problem is to provide for the needs of a changing Berkeley while retaining present values. I believe the council must re-evaluate and strengthen city services with thought for ALL Berkeley. Major issues are: 1) urban renewal, strong enough to rejuvenate our city, using private and public resources, modern zoning; 2) a workable transportation plan to insure rapid and safe circulation and to include mass transit and traffic routes without sacrifice of Berkeley's beauty, school districts, and business centers; 3) fiscal and tax policies to support essential services and improvement without unfair tax burden."

Morris: You didn't mention your concern for the matter of intergroup relations?

B. May: That was a pressing problem. We were pressing it, but nobody else was! I mean, there wasn't great talk about it, but you will be pleased to know that at the candidates' meeting at the Burbank Junior High School PTA, Tuesday, March 17, early in the campaign, I said:

> "Equality of opportunity and responsibility are basic to democracy. Everyone in Berkeley should have a fair chance at education, employment, housing, and recreation. Everyone should be free to compete in the housing market for the house he prefers and can afford to buy or rent.

B. May: The new council must lead in eliminating discrimination. I will support a city commission on interracial adjustment, charged with the discussion and preparation of specific measures to insure fair employment practice and equal treatment in housing."

I'd like to have that used in its entirety, because we did it! We couldn't do it until after the next election, but we did it.

I endorsed school bonds that were proposed on the ballot because I felt we should give Berkeley's children educational opportunities adequate for the space age. [Begins reading from campaign material.]

"If elected, I pledge my best efforts to insure the better city-school board cooperation, improved recreation, transportation, and mental health facilities that we need to make Berkeley a better city for children and young people."

Morris: Were people involved in school activities concerned particularly with mental health services for the city?

B. May: We would have to look up the citizen's committee mental health report; which I endorsed. A proposal came up almost at once after I took my seat on the council. I don't remember that it had been pushed by school people, although they certainly weren't opposing it.

[Reading from statement.] "I support local mental health service for Berkeley to provide early detection and treatment. I urge that the Berkeley local mental health services supply a way for early discovery and treatment of mental illness to be established in our community. We read that mental illness has become the nation's number one health problem and that mentally ill people occupy more hospital beds than those with all other illnesses combined. We will save in human values as well as tax money if we attack this problem as we have tuberculosis, from the standpoint of prevention.

"Under the Short-Doyle Act, state funds can be secured for half the cost of the service. If I am elected, I will support a Berkeley mental health program which will include an outpatient clinic for diagnosis and treatment, psychiatric consultation, and information and educational services."

B. May: We three did succeed in passing a mental health program but not the full recommendation, until after the 1961 election. We were unable to secure the five votes for the mental health clinic, which gave direct services to patients.

[Looking through papers.] Here are my replies to the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce, but they don't seem to have sent me a copy to keep of their questions, which ran on and on and on.

Morris: Give me a sample of what you answered and the questions may be clear.

B. May: The very first one is obviously about freeways. I say,

> "No. An Ashby Avenue freeway would split school districts, destroy business centers and homes, and remove an estimated eighty-three acres from the tax rolls."

Morris: Good for you.

B. May: [Continues reading from answer.]

> "Freeways should be located on the boundaries of the city as far as possible and not where they will create barriers to divide Berkeley.
>
> "Commercial zoning should be expanded as needed in conformity with the Master Plan," which was lousy.

I don't know what I'm talking about on zoning in 1959. [Reads from second answer]:

> "Yes, with cooperative city-school financing and operation and high priority for the needs of south and west Berkeley."

Morris: I'll bet that's the recreation plan.

B. May: I agree. [Continues reading]:

> "Compensation for city employees should be adequate to attract and retain qualified personnel, but need not be higher than that paid elsewhere in the Bay Area for comparable work. The city should lead in safety, accident prevention, sound disability and retirement provisions, and personnel practices to promote morale and efficiency."

B. May: We haven't done it all yet. Question six:

> "Height restrictions are needed in zoning for the lower density, residential area. Lot coverage restrictions should serve to insure adequate outdoor space in high density zones where high buildings can be encouraged."

I've changed my mind on high buildings for Berkeley.

Morris: Had you boned up on zoning to prepare yourself for the campaign?

B. May: I had the Master Plan and the zoning map. But later, when we had a majority, we "down-zoned" the city; that is, we attempted to bring the zoning into conformity with the population estimate in the Master Plan. This hasn't been fully accomplished yet because we lost some zoning changes needed to reduce over-permissive zoning for multiple dwellings.

One loses faith in zoning when you realize how important the property owner or local resident becomes in zoning discussion. There is no conflict of interest like that of the individual property owner. He wants schools and child care centers and churches and health centers, but not in his neighborhood.

Morris: Nor out of his pocketbook.

B. May: It may not be his pocketbook. He's often willing to pay the taxes if the assumed noise and traffic and shouts of kids from the playground are on someone else's street.

Morris: You mean that whenever a zoning question came up, the immediate neighbors would protest?

B. May: Yes. Not invariably, but usually, and they practically always oppose a public facility of any kind or a church or a hospital.

Then, the next issue. [Reads from answer.]

> "Berkeley City Council should take responsibility for its own budget decisions, taking in consideration area levels of pay and cost of living."

I judge this was in reply to some request from personnel that we pay the same wages as a selected city or a group of cities. For example, San Francisco is stuck to this day with an ordinance that requires that they pay their fire and police the same salary as the highest salary in the state.

B. May: Then I say [reading from next answer],

> "Since private enterprise cannot furnish adequate local transit, it should be provided by the East Bay transit district and eventually tie into a Bay Area rapid transit system. The university should pay for the city services it needs and uses."

Morris: You were before your time with that statement, weren't you?

B. May: Oh, no. Past councils had been saying it, but the university had not been hearing it; it still doesn't.

Morris: Did they send you that lengthly questionnaire instead of inviting the candidates to come and talk to the chamber?

B. May: Yes. And then they printed it in some form, probably in the Berkeley Gazette. The chamber at that time did not have candidates' meetings. Their first one, as I remember it, was such a disaster as far as time and effort that I'm not sure that they've given another one.

Morris: When was that?

B. May: It was in '67, in the floods of candidates.

Then [looking at questionnaire]. Question 17. [Reading from answer]:

> "I have been asked to run by friends and neighbors who consider my educational, professional and volunteer experience to be useful preparation for public office. Berkeley seems to me to be moving too slowly and indecisively to meet today's problems. I would like to help initiate a workable program for a better Berkeley."

Proposition C: A Questionable Fair Housing Proposal

B. May: Then we come to the matter of Proposition C. This was a proposal which we were always convinced, though we had no way of proving it, had been brought up at a late date in the campaign to defeat Roy Nichols. It had been presented to the existing council at the last possible date on which they had a variety of choices, either to consider it and endorse it, or reject it, or to allow it to be printed on the ballot with no council action.

Morris: In other words, it was put on the ballot by the council?

B. May: Under the law, the council had either to put it on the ballot, or to hold public hearings and discuss it. It was brought up at a point at which they had no time to have an adequate public hearing or to discuss it and take a council stand. It was hastily written; it was copied in large measure from the City of New York fair housing ordinance, related primarily to rental property, and was opposed by many black property owners. It put many of us, but especially Roy, in a very difficult position.

We talked about it. We felt it was unworkable and unfair. If passed it could be amended only by further voter action. So, considering the implications, and as Roy Nichols decided that he must oppose it, Art Harris, C.O. MacMillan, Jim Whitney and I joined Roy Nichols in opposition. But I'm sure it was effective in losing all of us some votes, because it's difficult to explain, "Yes, I'm for fair housing in principle, but this is a lousy law."

It was, I think, one of the two factors in Roy Nichols' defeat by Dean Stone. One was the one-to-one contest of a black man against a well-known and on the whole well-liked, though conservative, man. The other was this complicated and little-understood ordinance, which was defeated, but Roy was, too.

I replied to the Chamber of Commerce question asking if I were in favor of fair housing [reading from answer],

> "Not in the form of a difficult-to-amend initiative measure as now proposed, without adequate public discussion. I believe in equality of opportunity."

More Campaign Positions

B. May: And then another question about if I planned to lower taxes [reading from answer]:

> "In a period of inflation and sharply rising prices, it seems unrealistic to anticipate any greatly lowered cost for a local government. I will support economical and efficient operation of essential services."

B. May: And here's -- didn't I read you local mental health out of something?

Morris: When you spoke to the Burbank PTA.

B. May: Oh, well, here it is again for the Chamber of Commerce. [Reading from answer]:

> "I support local mental health services for early detection and treatment as a means of decreasing mental illness with its heavy cost in human values and to the taxpayer. Under the Short-Doyle Act, the state will pay half the cost of local programs in the hope of reducing the need for present expensive care for the mentally ill."

Morris: I am impressed by your consistency; you said the same thing to the Chamber of Commerce that you said to the PTA.

B. May: I have a poor memory; I never can lie!

Morris: I was wondering if after they subjected you to this voluminous questionnaire, did the Chamber of Commerce then endorse you?

B. May: No. A good many members of the Chamber of Commerce helped me, but they didn't endorse me. I believe it's chamber policy not to support candidates.

Morris: Here's a KPFA question sheet.

B. May: KPFA invited me to tell them why I was running. [Reading from KPFA question sheet]:

> "What pattern of thinking led you to run for office and what specific things not now being done will you work for if you're elected?"

And I seemed to think I knew why I was running.

Morris: Did they put you on the air?

B. May: Yes. As I remember, it was a direct broadcast. I said [reading from answer]:

> "I was asked to run by mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors. I live in Berkeley and am concerned at Berkeley's sudden aging in decision-making. We do too little and too late in face of problems."

B. May: This is a very confused copy. I must have written it with one hand on the way down to KPFA, driving a car. [Continues reading from answer]:

> "My third reason for running is enthusiasm for and faith in local government."

Now, the things I wished to work for were "democratic controls -- "

Morris: With a small or a large d?

B. May: [Laughter] A small d. [Continues reading]:

> "-- conciliation and equality of opportunity, mental health, metropolitan government, city-school cooperation."

Morris: That's the first time you mentioned metropolitan government. Did that come along later in the campaign?

B. May: In 1951, we were talking about it chiefly in opposition to the proposed Golden Gate Authority, modeled on the New York Port Authority, already obsolete. The Golden Gate Authority was one of the first proposals for a metropolitan agency, and was finally defeated.

[Looking through papers.] Here seems to be a draft on city planning. [Reading from draft]: "

> "As a citizen, I'm for a workable program for a better Berkeley and for more active leadership to achieve it. As a person who's enjoyed living in Berkeley for many years, I am prepared, if elected, to give much time and my best abilities to identify Berkeley's needs and to discover common sense solutions to lessen our problems. I believe a modern city council must review city services continuously, in the interest of both improvement and economy, and set standards and a budget under which the city manager and his staff can administer a well-run, clean, and safe city.
>
> "Like other municipalities in California, Berkeley faces many pressures and has new needs. We must work to eliminate the causes of the present racial tensions, to provide better and more evenly distributed recreation for youth as well as senior citizens, to initiate a

B. May: sound, local mental health program, and to plan more effective and safer traffic flow.

"In thinking of finances, we'll do well to start with recognizing Berkeley's needs and attempting to find, through use of the city's credit as well as through more equitable taxes, ways to finance presently needed services and to invest in Berkeley's future.

"Berkeley should take the initiative in cooperating with neighboring cities to tackle creatively and consistently such area problems as mass transit, through traffic, conservation of nearby open spaces, smog, and juvenile delinquency.

"Another problem about which I feel special concern is the spreading blight in Berkeley's neighborhoods. I'd like to help strengthen zoning ordinances to insure space for both people and parking -- to expand parks and tree planting programs and to step up an urban renewal program, using federal funds where available.

"If all segments of Berkeley will first think about and then work on these familiar problems, Berkeley can again be a model, all-American city."

[Ends reading of draft.]

Morris: Oh, that's lovely.

B. May: Here's a draft for an unidentified group but it must have been some of the downtown boys because I have several things in there they'd like to hear and some things they wouldn't.

Oh, here's a note on the back of this flyer. It says that I want an active Art Commission. Perhaps this was the Rotary Club.

Morris: Were they interested in the artistic side of things?

B. May: They were interested in the Art Commission and they gave Berkeley eventually, you know --

Morris: That beautiful building over there behind Live Oak Park.

B. May: In Live Oak, yes.

Morris: I was wondering whether that was initiated by the Rotary Club, or whether the Art Commission went looking for --

B. May: I think our former recreation director, Gene Saalwachter, had a hand in that. He was a Rotarian. They wanted to celebrate Rotary's fifty years in Berkeley by making a gift to the city, but, of course, they couldn't afford a new city hall. I don't think either Gene or the Rotary Club realized that the Berkeley artists who had no place to show their work were almost all modern.

We had expected it to be used for photography, as it has, and also for gardening displays and whatnot. I think it's a charming building. But it was a controversial question a little later.

[Looking through papers.] These are -- I seem to be repeating myself.

Morris: These would be each to different organizations that you spoke to?

B. May: Yes, optimistically adapting my draft to their interests and questions.

Distinguished Advisers

Morris: Were these statements and positions that you were campaigning on -- did you work these out with Jack Kent and Art Harris?

B. May: Nobody has time! Every man for himself. I found someplace, undated, a platform which the Caucus had adopted and I believe it is for this first run. Except urban renewal, most of the issues that I've mentioned were in the Caucus platform.

Morris: You know, not having had the tape recorder to follow you around with when you were campaigning, it's nice to have some of those early statements.

You said earlier that Jack Kent was the one who called up and said, "If you're thinking of running for office, let me talk to you about running for the city council." I wondered if you and he were well enough acquainted that you had talked local government with him and also with Mr. Harris and knew what --

B. May: Yes, with both of them. One of my few political volunteer jobs had been sending out leaflets for Art Harris when he ran for the council the first time. He had just completed, as a graduate student, a short history of city management in Berkeley. He was one of my husband's students and later, during his time at law school, worked for what was then the Bureau of Public Administration and was at our house frequently.

The people who worked in a not too crowded field at the University of California formed sub-communities. It's just like being in Paris or London -- there are people who share your interests; you only have to find them. Art was one of the student ASPA group, American Society for Public Administration, so he and I knew each other's views very well. I'm to the left of Art, but not far.

I had known Jack Kent almost as long. My husband and Deming Tilden, who was the city planner for Santa Barbara and then for San Francisco, where he was Jack's boss, had both taught planning on campus. Planning in the '40s was under poly sci and so under public administration. When the university, urged by both Tilden and May, felt the need for a more visible and larger series of courses in planning, they recommended Kent. He got the appointment and after that, he was at our home and with the bureau staff often, because there was much exchange of ideas.

Morris: Was Mary Kent also a Berkeley girl, born and raised?

B. May: Yes. Her father, Professor Edward Tolman, was one of the leading lights of the psychology department. Her sister, Deborah Tolman, was Jim Whitney's wife.

Morris: Is that how Dr. Whitney was converted to political interests?

B. May: He had inherited my favorite issues because, as he once said at a party where we were all feeling a little above ourselves, "When your name is Whitney, what can you be but a conservationist?" Mt. Whitney was named for his uncle, grandfather, or someone of his pioneer family.

Morris: I see. So, he was raised with a concern for mountains.

B. May: Though never elected to office, his support for open space, youth services, and an integrated society had great influence on Berkeley. He was one of the good friends I made in the 1959

B. May: campaign.*

Morris: Did he continue to be a person whom you consulted?

B. May: Yes. I didn't always agree with his ideas, but frequently I did.

Morris: What particularly did you talk to him about?

B. May: He was as interested in ecology as I was and we talked about that a great deal. He was deeply concerned with integration and greatly approved of our efforts -- for example, one of my pet ideas developed because I was the liaison to the Park and Recreation Commission. There I quickly came to realize that the parks were not integrated in the sense of having services that people wanted in all neighborhoods.

Jim was a great supporter of a change in parks, in part because he was for integration, and also because he believed that in every part of the city there should be plenty of space for big muscle activities. I think he would have been very amused by some of the people in the hills, particularly around Codornices, who tried to persuade us that balls were going out of fashion and that we should now have no games involving balls, that they were not modern. So, it was in this kind of thing that Jim was a great help.

Morris: He was a psychiatrist, wasn't he?

B. May: Yes, he was a Jungian psychiatrist. He was a graduate of Yale and then had qualified, I think, as the first Jungian in this area.

Morris: Was he particularly useful in helping you come to a decision on the mental health program?

B. May: No, I don't recall discussing that with him. We may have, but my support for mental health was a foregone conclusion because I'd campaigned for it. The Alameda County Mental Health Association had made a report on mental health to the city council and that

---

*See Mrs. May's papers for press clippings and campaign materials about Dr. Whitney and the program of the memorial service after his death. Ed.

B. May: report had come in before the campaign started. The continuing members of the council had already had a good deal of discussion and lobbying on this.

Lobbying I considered a legitimate activity. Not enough people do it. Not enough people come to tell you what they know and what their interest is. A bribe is not compulsory when you're being lobbied.

Morris: Yes, I understand.

B. May: But maybe it would be better to use a less direct word.

Morris: Not necessarily. If lobbying is the proper term also for the citizen talking to his representative.

B. May: Yes. The trouble is the citizen has to make his contributions with no tax deduction for it, whereas the businessman hides in his regular business expense whatever it costs him to be represented at a legislative body. The professional lobbyist, of course, a little further up the line, is paid to present the strong points.

Morris: That's true.

B. May: I think that the League of Women Voters, the Sierra Club, or what have you should have the same right to present their viewpoints without tax discouragement.

Morris: How would you define the difference between a public interest organization and one that should be more closely regulated?

B. May: The ones that should be more closely regulated, I think, are the business organizations, which should report their lobbying expenditures separately as part of their regular financial reports. No group of citizens who have a recommendation for legislation should be barred, but that full disclosure should apply to lobbying expenditures.

The Need for Change

Morris: You mentioned several times in the notes for your speeches that Berkeley was doing too little too late. Was there a recognized opposition that was distinctly trying to keep the city government from moving forward?

B. May: Yes, I'm sure out of a feeling that they were doing what was best for Berkeley or at least Berkeley taxpayers. But for the entire postwar period, they had one viewpoint, to keep taxes down. They carried this to such extremes that such funds as the city's pension and disability funds were not on an actuarial basis. The men had been paying their share and the city had been paying pensions out of what the men were paying without depositing each year the full share for the city.

So, one of the great shocks that came to me on the city budget was that we were far behind and that the city manager had pointed this out frequently to our predecessors. The next lot of us that came in were informed about this, as Zack Brown probably was already because he had a sound knowledge of how you should treat public funds.

Then, maintenance had simply not been kept up on a great many buildings. Population and age group shifts had not been taken into consideration in public buildings and public utilities, particularly in regard to parks. For example, south Berkeley at that time had the largest city park, taken up almost entirely with two full-sized, big league baseball fields and some tennis courts, plus a horribly run down, little, old building. There were no facilities at all for small children, for family picnics, no tables and chairs for older people to play chess, and the whole city came down and played baseball at San Pablo Park.

We thought, and later we did it with a great deal of trouble, that it would be much better for everybody if the San Pablo kids could go up and play at Codornices and other hill parks as well.

Morris: Was there objection to the Negro boys from the San Pablo neighborhood coming up to play at Codornices and Live Oak?

B. May: Yes, particularly Codornices.

Morris: That's interesting. They're only about a quarter of a mile apart as the crow flies.

B. May: Yes. I don't remember any protest from Live Oak. As a matter of fact, we couldn't put a field at Live Oak, now that I think of it, because there wasn't enough level ground that could be spared for even a small field. But the outcry from the Codornices area was obviously racist in character, though I think not so recognized by many of the people who were making the protest. It was one of the ways in which we learned of the persistence of racist feelings among people who thought of themselves as liberals.

Another point at which maintenance was years behind was in streets and sewers. We did get a bond issue passed for sewers, which was helpful, but not for other lacks which if met would bring the city up to a well-maintained level.

Morris: Was this because the people on the council prior to you and your colleagues being elected were not paying attention, or was it their supporters in the community saying, "This is what we do or don't want to have happen?"

B. May: I think they had another concept of the responsibilities of government. It's hard for me to apply this to the pension situation, in which they were really using --

Morris: That sounds like it might even have been illegal and certainly not very sound just as bookkeeping.

B. May: Yes. It certainly would have been illegal if they'd ever failed to pay a pension. Pensioners were paid, but the new employees coming in were not sufficiently protected. But I think the responsible councils did not think in these terms. On the whole, they believed that the least government at the least cost was the best.

They ran the council by making sure that if a councilman was not going to run in the next election, he would resign some months in advance. Then they would appoint someone who would serve a few months and then appear on the ballot as an incumbent. It made them a successful and self-perpetuating group.

I think you would have to ask some of them what they thought they were doing to the city rather than me.

Morris: Claude Hutchison, who was mayor for two terms, seemed to feel that his job was largely ceremonial.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: And also to have some pride in various improvements that were made. In the oral history interview that we did with him some years ago, his feeling seemed to be that there were those who felt that the city should provide more services than he felt were needed. He was also concerned at this new idea that there should be a raise in salaries every year, because it hadn't been that way when he was coming along, and about partisan politics in local government. He felt that Laurance Cross had been responsible for the beginning of partisan activity in local elections.

B. May: I am sure that Mayor Hutchison did not believe, as I do, that local government should have concern for the social needs of individuals. He, I think, considers American government as dealing with the classical services -- safety, police, fire, streets, and so on. I'm sure that he objected to partisan activity in local politics. I believe in it. I've never debated this with Mayor Hutchison, but I wonder what his response would be if he had been in the party that never was elected to city office.

If you recall Gene Lee's book, Partisanship in Local Government in California, the overwhelming majority of county and city officials were Republicans in the middle '50s. Women were scarce as hen's teeth and there were no blacks.

Morris: I'm interested that, in view of deteriorating physical plant and services, the business community was not concerned. One hears of the Gazette and real estate and some of the larger merchants in town as being those who were in power, as it were; that they were the ones who controlled the council. I wondered if that was true from your view, question one, and, question two, why, if it was true, they weren't concerned about the physical plant needing to be repaired and kept up?

B. May: Because they didn't think it was necessary. Berkeley's level of merchandising has not been high and Berkeley has had through the years a constant flow of outside money that the students spend. This is like tourist money; students are not likely to go away from the local stores and the local merchants do not need to do modern or high-powered merchandising.

A number of surveys have said that. One of the early surveys of Shattuck Avenue that we had, pointed out what a barrier to shopping the physical set-up of wide Shattuck Avenue

B. May: then was, and yet there was no support from the merchants for redesigning Shattuck Avenue. We got the opportunity to do it later with the undergrounding of BART, still with little downtown support.

No, I think that many people were content with the city drifting along. There had been other efforts, of course, through the years. Certainly some of the measures, even in 1959, that the candidates for change were proposing were quite new in public life -- mental health facilities, for example. But Berkeley wouldn't support services which many cities already had.

Richmond, much less affluent, with a smaller tax base, has had a large public swimming pool for years. Berkeley didn't have a single outdoor swimming pool until, with great trouble, I insisted that we put it in the city's capital improvements. We took it out of capital improvement funds, which we begrudged, because we would rather have bought more land. But we decided that we just never were going to get a bond passed.

I must say that previous councils had received a certain amount of justification from the fact that it was very hard to get either school or city bonds passed. I'm sure this must have reenforced their policy, but I consider it to have been a foolish one. They let neighborhoods go downhill because the inspection services were not strict. In the first place, they didn't have enough staff. So, a good deal of our housing stock had deteriorated.

Morris: How did John Phillips, as the city manager, feel about this?

B. May: He would have been glad to have had a larger budget, but he was well paid and was able to have a good deal of freedom as city manager. He was very interested in urban renewal and had supported that.

Morris: That involved some other sources of funds too, didn't it, besides tax?

B. May: Yes. And the city manager, you know, is there to do what the council tells him.

Morris: Yes. There is a continuing debate in public administration circles, I think, as to what extent the city manager should initiate policy or prod for it. In other words, he would be

Morris: one who did not feel that the city manager should take strong initiative in things he thought the council should be thinking about.

B. May: Yes, though I'm sure, from the rapidity with which he spoke up after we had a majority, that he was worried by city pensions and worried by maintenance postponements. But he was not prepared for the pressure to employ blacks. He felt that when the city said it didn't discriminate, that it was a fair employer, that ended it. But I think he became converted as we went along.

Morris: Had he been a student of your husband's?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: That's kind of marvelous to have observed a whole generation of the city administrators in the state, while they were students.

B. May: Yes. Quite a few of them preceded me. City managers vary. Some of them like a peaceful life and a council that isn't always thinking of something new to get somebody out on a limb.

Oh, I think a more liberal council was a good experience for John Phillips, because he's done well since then.

Morris: He's in Southern California, isn't he, now?

B. May: Yes. Pasadena and retiring this year (1974).

Election Returns

Morris: There was one other question I wanted to ask about the election process before we get off into the council itself. When you had been elected and won, did you and your committee go back over the precinct records of who had voted where?

B. May: Yes. Two people analyzed the vote, Owen and Babette Chamberlain from one mathematical formula* and Jack Hull, who is a metallurgical engineer, on campus at the time and very active in Democratic politics.

---

*These reports are in Mrs. May's papers in The Bancroft Library.

Morris: Had you known him before?

B. May: Yes, I had known him on campus. As a matter of fact, he had earlier tried to enlist me for campaigning for some Democratic candidate and I can't remember why I didn't wish to do so. I'm sorry to say I never wanted to do the cookie-baking and the coffee-making.

Morris: What about the precincting and the scheduling? That's one level above the cookie-baking.

B. May: Perhaps, but I felt the same way. After experiencing a campaign I appreciate volunteers for seemingly routine jobs better. It's fun, in the first place, if you're with a good team. You see and recruit old friends and for some months it's exciting. It often leads, even in small cities, to hearing and meeting party leaders and discussing (if not determining) issues. Before inflation, you lunched with Bernice Brown, the governor's astute and witty wife, and felt near the capitol dome. As a councilman I was surprised and delighted to find myself entitled to tickets to the convention in Los Angeles which nominated John F. Kennedy for president. I went -- and so did some of my volunteers. Can you think of a more satisfactory recognition of volunteer service?

Although I hadn't responded to Jack's suggestions, he was helpful in 1959. After the campaign, he charted the precinct returns and added them to the records he had been keeping and was able, in the next two years, to make useful suggestions, as he had earlier in regard to where to put our efforts.

Morris: Do you remember what he came up with as being the areas of particular strength for you in '59?

B. May: In '59, I got a very good vote in south Berkeley and west Berkeley, in the flats generally, in the north Berkeley hills. During my entire political career I never carried my own precinct.

Morris: Without honor in your own home! [Laughter]

B. May: Yes! [Laughter] And I did not get a good vote in the extreme southeast Berkeley, at any time -- the Claremont-Elmwood district. I bettered myself a little as the campaigns went along, or the population changed. But, on the whole, my strength lay in the north Berkeley hills, all of the flats, and west and south Berkeley.

Morris: What about the precincts close to the university that are now considered student territory?

B. May: It was considered student territory then. Students in '59 voted so sparsely that we didn't campaign there. We campaigned on campus and we got good campus sponsorship and workers, but I think their efforts resulted in my good vote in the north Berkeley hills. Claremont has never been a faculty district, though some faculty people live here now.

Morris: Yes. Primarily people who are in business, oriented to San Francisco, isn't it?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: What kinds of suggestions do you recall that Mr. Hull had from analyzing the '59 results for '63?

B. May: For places to put in the strength of the money, the literature, and specialized efforts to get out the vote which probably began in '61. The system under which you have prepared carefully to get out the vote in a district where you think your candidate is strong, but voters tend to forget, you've prepared a card for each house at which there is a registered voter. It's a card that slides over the doorknob and it says something like this: Today is election day. You vote at the garage at 123 Action. BE SURE TO VOTE FOR MAY! or Sweeney or whoever.

I walked a precinct, or two precincts rather, with Otho Green. We did it together because Otho said, "I won't have you walking around in the dark down here. You aren't used to these neighborhoods." I said, "Where do you live?"

He lived right near me -- on Alvarado. Anyway, we couldn't start as early as in the past, he said, because it was rumored that the opposition was going to follow us and take the cards off the door. This was during the school board attempted recall, which we opposed and which was defeated decisively.

Morris: I thought that was part of the sport and risk of campaigning; in the last couple of elections, that seems to have been the case. For at least two candidates, workers were out with their door cards, swiping them or just piling them up two and three on a doorknob.

B. May: Campaigning isn't a sport.

Morris: How can you tell that people in this precinct or that need to be reminded to vote? Is it a precinct that has a low vote turnout?

B. May: By previous elections. Usually it's a black precinct, or it's more accurate to say an economically disadvantaged precinct. These are places where people must go to work early. They come home tired, some of them are hopeless and they need this little extra shove. This is where you use the sound truck, for example, and you remember that we had three days of sound truck in my 1959 campaign.

Morris: Were you on the microphone in the sound truck?

B. May: No. You get beautiful black voices.

I think each campaign doesn't justify presenting in as much detail as we're doing on this first one.

Morris: I think you're right.

B. May: But I thought if we could set a pattern in this, in the later ones we can add --

Morris: The differences as you went along.

B. May: Yes. Because these campaigns, in a way, illustrate what will be one of our major themes in the issues, the variety and intensity of the attempts to integrate Berkeley.

Morris: Along that line, did you find the Gazette took an active role in that?

B. May: I believe that the Gazette opposed fair housing actively in 1963 but, again, my memory tends to pull out highlights. One of the main shouts of the Gazette and of other newspaper opposition was aimed at the penalty, which was only a misdemeanor, but sounded as if we put in capital punishment.

Morris: Is there anything else you can think of that should be included in describing your first campaign?

B. May: [Pauses to think.] No, because a great deal is one detail after another, like the little day-by-day notebooks I kept. For example, one day there was a cryptic note saying, "Fred says this check does not include the dance." Who cares now?

Morris: In connection with the 'women in politics' aspect of this oral history we're doing, there's an interesting article in the Carnegie Quarterly Report about a study of fifty women legislators elected in party primaries and general elections.

B. May: I also read that report and have sent for the book* to be published on this study on why these women were selected by their party, what their characteristics are. One comment in the report that struck me was that these women legislators concentrated more on passage of bills and less on how you get reelected -- continuing their careers -- than men legislators. The conclusion was that they didn't think they were going far anyway. They were more interested in passing legislation, but not necessarily legislation for women's rights. They were achievement-oriented non-conformists.

Morris: How does this relate to councilmen in non-partisan California cities?

B. May: Not directly, I feel, except in pointing out that men and women officials do not differ greatly in fundamental characteristics. Women, however, seem reluctant to be self-starters -- and here the party support, usually lacking for councilmen, has been important for legislators. Both legislators and councilmen so far have tended to be middle aged. That, I'm sure, will change -- and soon.

Morris: If we could work it in, it would be a good addition to women in politics to ask Sue Hone to talk with us, too, from the viewpoint of a younger woman.**

B. May: She was here a few days ago to ask me to go with her to a new organization of Bay Area elected women. I'm not sure Sue has

---

*Political Women, Jeanne J. Kirkpatrick, Basic Books Inc., 1974.

**A short interview with Ms Hone was recorded in October, 1974, and is being processed [1975]. Ed.

B. May: gone yet; I hope soon I'll be able to go.

I haven't talked much with Sue about her experiences on the council. It's probably not time yet for her to make more than general comments.

Morris: Let's see, she was appointed after long discussions about who would be the replacement when John Swingle resigned -- with the understanding that she would then run for a full term. She was elected in 1973.

B. May: In time, I hope Sue will do a slice of oral history on her own for the Bancroft. I think it would be good to have her account of campaigning, the council, and this new women's organization, especially since she's a Cal graduate, too. She might well report on the difficulty of recruiting women with small children to run for office.

Morris: Do you think she will continue a career in politics?

B. May: I hope she will run for higher office. I might have done so myself, if I'd been of a different age group.

Morris: I agree.

B. May: There's one aspect of the literature on women in politics that I've evolved a different opinion on, out of Berkeley history. That's this idea of time. One of the qualifications that women use in campaigning is, I have the time -- a good deal of leisure to keep in touch with things. It's been used in a sex-linked way.*

I find that a good number of men offer this too -- maybe it's a more noticeable factor in Berkeley -- Think of the number of men who've been elected who are retired or just about to retire: Mayor Hutchison, Dean Stone. Or men who had leisure, like Laurance Cross, a minister and also mayor. Ministers have plenty of occupation, but they don't have tight schedules. There are also men who have their business thoroughly organized and can therefore command their own time, like Wallace Johnson. Ability should count more than time.

Morris: Perhaps time available will grow in importance for candidates as older citizens continue to increase their proportionate voting strength.

---

*The comments from here through p. 221 were added to the transcript by Mrs. May. Ed.

B. May: Have we time and space enough for one more episode in my experiences as a woman in politics?

Morris: Of course.

B. May: This happened in 1962, when I had been a councilman for three years. I had forgotten it until the other day when one of my nieces asked if I had ever liberated anything. "Of course," I said, "a bus trip."

As a new councilman I went to all meetings I got notices of, unless something important intervened. I sometimes felt I was met with surprise by the men there. Mrs. Thomas appeared to attend only the council and council committees. But there was no great stir until the East Bay Municipal Utility District sent council members invitations for a two-day inspection of their mountain dams and reservoirs, with bus transportation and overnight lodging at one of their field houses. I accepted promptly, with genuine pleasure.

Morris: Why not?

B. May: A lady should have known better, Mrs. Thomas implied, when she told me before the next council session, that no woman had ever gone on the EBMUD tour. She suggested that I pull out to save embarassment all around -- I felt empathy for black friends who reported similar experiences.

Morris: What did you do?

B. May: I said -- or probably sputtered -- I'm an elected councilman and greatly interested in our water supply from the Mokelumne and especially in anti-pollution measures. I think I should go. Mrs. Thomas gave up, sadly.

I went with some thirty men -- chiefly commissioners and city staff. Zack Brown was the only other councilman to go and a great help to me. Nobody told me about the all night poker game until dinner time.

Morris: Did you liberate that, too?

B. May: No. Asked to play, I refused politely and went to bed early, after a good day, with plenty to read, lulled by a steady roar from the living room and the poker players. Many looked weary on the way home the next day and slept in the bus while Zack and I and a few hardy souls saw the sights.

Morris: What next?

B. May: Nothing, really. I liberated that excursion but it didn't last. I got no more invitations for mountain junkets. Apparently all I demonstrated was "If you don't want Mrs. May to come, don't ask her."

My earlier experience at the University of California contrasted sharply with that at city hall. Cal-Berkeley may have seemed stuffy to students, but not to me, in regard to the place of women. Women appointees to good administrative jobs were scarce, but if appointed, we were expected to assume full responsibility and share privileges.

As the one woman administrator on the ESMWT administrative staff of ten or so, I was expected to carry my share, and to travel as a member of ESMWT teams to Los Angeles or Washington, as need arose. I remember plenty of arguments over what to do but no "it's not women's work -- send a man."

Morris: Berkeley's changed since then.

B. May: Time and voters have pushed the city to recognize women as persons since my hilarious jaunt, which showed that men and women can be equally stubborn. I put down my flag and moved on to other important issues on which my vote was effective and could be decisive.

VIII THE CITY COUNCIL IN 1959
(Date of Interview: May 18, 1974)

On Becoming a Councilwoman

Morris: I was wondering if you recall what your impressions were and your reactions when you were sworn in and upon taking your seat in the city council chamber.

B. May: It was all very quiet. I went down alone to take the oath of office and was not pleased by having to take the distasteful oath that forced one to say, "I have not been a Communist for so many years," or, "I have never been a Communist." I was glad there was no audience to see me sworn in, but I signed the oath. Earlier on my World War II job I had had to sign one. As I recall it, we signed this oath with every federal contract in ESMWT.

Morris: A separate oath with each contract?

B. May: Yes. Since I had signed so many, I thought I could sign one more for the City of Berkeley. The time was still, as we were saying earlier in regard to the league and the YWCA, the tail end of the period in which the oath was part of McCarthyism, which was diminishing, but not over. So, after having done that quietly with the city clerk, I turned up, again with no fanfare, at my first council meeting and was a little surprised that no member of my committee came to see that I actually was there. Some of them came later when they had special interests.

Morris: Agenda items that they were interested in?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Later in that meeting, or at later meetings?

B. May: No, no. Three or four months later, as far as I can recall!

Morris: Oh, dear! After all that work they'd done!

B. May: I was a little surprised at this, but then I could see why. They were tired, too, and a month had elapsed.

I was told by Mayor Hutchison that it was one of the traditions of the Berkeley City Council that a new member took the chair of the person he or she was replacing. Since I had been elected to Congressman Jeffrey Cohelan's seat, the mayor led me to the seat on the furthest left of the council desk, left as you come out and face the audience, right as the audience looks at you. This left me a long way from the presiding officer, which once in a while I felt to be a slight handicap. But I soon learned to speak firmly and briefly and I kept this seat throughout my councilmanic career.

Fellow Councilmembers

Morris: Would you give me a thumbnail description of your fellow councilpeople at that point? I've made a list.

We've talked a bit about Jack Kent and Arthur Harris having been predecessors and supporters of yours. Then, Claude Hutchison was mayor and the holdover councilpeople were John De Bonis, Arthur Beckley, and Weldon Richards. Mrs. Thomas was reelected that year and Dean Stone was elected to the two-year seat, and then there's you.

B. May: In the interests of accuracy, Arthur Harris had answered my questions and encouraged me in private, but, since he was running for office himself, he felt it was not appropriate to endorse me. He was, at that time, the person with the longest service on the council, effective and capable, particularly in that political art best described as timing. He was skillful at knowing the appropriate time to begin debate or to end it by offering a motion. From his law office on Shattuck, Art kept us in touch with downtown Berkeley.

One of the things that certainly helped a minority member was Art's advice, "Cut your losses if you can't win. Go on to the next thing and wait. Maybe we'll get it another time."

B. May: The next oldest from the point of service, I think, was Mr. Beckley.

Morris: Yes.

B. May: He exemplified a kind of politician that I expect would hardly be believed nowadays. He was a very conservative man. He would always tell you why briefly and, if you'd ask him in private, sometimes rather roughly, why in hell do you want to do that? But he usually would end by saying, if you've got five votes, you can do it. Later on, when I did have the five votes, he would frequently say to me: Well, now, look. You've got the votes. You can do it. But this is something that would facilitate it. This is something that would make it stronger in my opinion, if you must do it.

Morris: That's interesting.

B. May: Particularly on procedure. He would very often make valuable suggestions. We talked about, as the first major issue, the mental health program. He said to me from the beginning: You know, if you people want to have a clinic which would give direct service to individuals, you can't have my vote. But, if you want to put it through, I'll make your fifth vote any time you leave the clinic out.

People call this vote trading, but is it better to come in with part of what you want and count on getting an amendment later? This is one of the judgements you have to make.

He also never downgraded either Mrs. Thomas or myself as full members of the council, but he also couldn't bear outside the council to see us go without the privileges of women. For a long time, I thought we got coffee and doughnuts and cookies as a city hall expense and finally discovered that Mr. Beckley always paid for Mrs. Thomas and myself.

Morris: That's nice. He functioned quite a lot as a representative of the city in Sacramento and in Washington, didn't he?

B. May: Yes. I don't recall that in these early years we ever had anything much to be represented in Washington about. In Sacramento he frequently appeared for the city, which we in the minority thought was one of the things that, if we ever were a majority, we would change. He couldn't avoid representing a conservative, middle-of-the-road viewpoint. A council which represents a spread of philosophies should not send the same person each time.

Morris: Was he voted for that duty by the rest of the council, or did he just do it because it was a convenient thing and it had come to be the habit to send Art Beckley?

B. May: He went anyway as a representative of Cutter Lab, of which he was an officer. When we went on this Republican council, which was, we felt, a penny-pinching one, we realized that nobody else who would go up without charging his expenses could probably be found. The council, throughout my experience on it, voted whether or not to take legislative action, whether or not to appear at the hearing, or whether the advocacy or opposition should be expressed in a letter.

So, whenever Mr. Beckley appeared he did have the council's authorization, but it was taken for granted that it would be Beckley who would make the appearance.

Morris: Were there any issues that might have been considered a conflict of interest between his city council advocacy and his Cutter Laboratories advocacy?

B. May: Mr. Beckley would have then disqualified himself because this would have been a disadvantage to Cutter as well as to the city. He and I, of course, were drawn together immediately by our deep opposition to the Ashby Freeway. He lived on the corner of Ashby and Piedmont, so he was even more concerned than I.

Morris: I should say. It would have been right on his doorstep.

B. May: Whenever the Ashby Freeway was mentioned, we fell over ourselves to be the first to say, "The city attorney informs me I have no conflict of interest. My home would be taken by the Ashby Freeway, but it's only my home and my sentimental attachment to it that's being destroyed. The city attorney tells me that it is assumed that the state will give me the full value of my property. If I don't agree with the price, I have recourse to the courts. So, I will suffer no money loss and therefore I have no conflict of interest."

Morris: In other words, legally, they make a distinction between a financial conflict of interest and an emotional conflict of interest. Very interesting.

B. May: Yes, this is what Mr. Anderson told us. But, as I say, Art and I fell over each other to be the first to say this to the audience, who might think, "What are those two doing?" Not that we ever had much trouble with the votes in opposition

B. May: to the Ashby Freeway, but we wanted to and usually did make it unanimous.

Then, there was John De Bonis, who had been on the council a full term before me. He has, I believe, changed his viewpoint, going further and further to that point at which the very conservative and the far leftist unite. But at the time we first served on the council together, I found that Mr. De Bonis, though I think sincere in his wish for the best for the city, appeared inconsistent in that he would support a proposal such as increased compensation, particularly for firemen and policemen, and then would vote against the budget that would supply the increase.

Morris: Yes, I've heard that from other people who've observed him closely over the years.

B. May: My first impression of him was that he was inconsistent in recommending things that people wanted and then being unable to agree that the money should be spent. He leaned heavily on the taxpayers' association and thoroughly approved of the budgets that the council had been using before 1961.

Now, Mrs. Thomas, who had served longer than Mr. De Bonis. She was a delightful woman, very conservative, strongly in opposition to mental health in all of its phases, but a charming and interesting companion.

Morris: Had you had personal acquaintance and contact with her?

B. May: I had known her casually, through my husband. She attended many meetings on campus and elsewhere to which my husband went. I remember her attending the three-day conference which the university held at the time of my husband's retirement, instead of having just a --

Morris: A banquet sort of thing?

B. May: They had a banquet anyway. We all ate in those days, heavily. But I remember Mrs. Thomas coming to the conference and making interesting contributions. It was a conference on what was going to happen next in public administration.

Morris: How marvelous! Was the thinking: How could it possibly go on without Professor May in charge?

B. May: There seemed to be a little of that. While it hadn't been planned that there would be as many tributes as there were, when the main speakers had finished and people were speaking from the floor, many men got up and said, "I must say first that, really, Sam May was my father." His youngest son, Kenneth, who was sitting next to me much of the time, said, "Just wait! Next time I'm going to get up and I'm going to say, 'Sam May is my father and I'm legitimate!'" But he didn't.

Morris: That's marvelous. It must have been an experience to have all these other people say, "I feel like he's my father."

B. May: Yes! But it was in this kind of session on government that Mrs. Thomas interested herself. And she would discuss ahead of time an issue that was coming up. She and I seldom voted together except on architectural plans, where we later on, after the citizens had voted to put a firehouse in Fremontia Park --

Morris: Is that The Alameda and Marin?

B. May: Yes. It was a move which, in our campaigns, Mrs. Thomas and I had both opposed. We had some trouble with the other members of the council because Robert Ratcliff submitted a plan which entranced the two of us. It was a round firehouse with beautiful doors, maybe not the most convenient firehouse in the world because it had no tower to hand the fire hoses to dry. You dry the hose on racks instead. We had a little trouble getting the men on the council to vote with us for this, but finally we squeaked out the five votes.

Morris: In other words, you voted against the use of that park territory, but then you voted for --

B. May: We voted for the round firehouse. The neighborhood had put on the ballot a referendum which passed. The council was forbidden to use a perfectly good lot in the neighborhood, which would have meant they would have been spared the round firehouse. I'm not sure whether they all liked the final result.

Morris: Once it was built, didn't it receive all sorts of awards?

B. May: It did and it was written up in the London Times. But I'm not sure that that appeased the people who lived in the area. The plan saved all but some twelve trees in Fremontia Park.

B. May: As I was saying, Mrs. Thomas would discuss whatever issue was coming up with me, if she had an opportunity, but after the vote, I don't remember her ever carrying a dispute on. It was over and done with.

Morris: Had she had a professional career herself?

B. May: No. Her husband was an engineer, she'd lived in a variety of places, always interested in public affairs, but I think she had not worked herself. She was very aware of what she felt was the menace of communist infiltration and this motivated her to run for the council.

Morris: I think the first Berkeley City Council meeting I ever went to was on the mental health program and I remember hearing her speaking to the point that there was danger of Communist brainwashing in mental health treatments.

B. May: Yes, in Alaska. That was the way communism was coming.

Then whom have we skipped?

Morris: Weldon Richards.

B. May: Weldon Richards was a man with whom I served for two years.

There had been for a long time much criticism because people did not consider him a bona fide resident of Berkeley. He had a real estate office in Berkeley which he listed as his residence. He said that he did have a small bedroom there and that this was where he lived. His wife and children lived in another community and the Richards were not separated or divorced.

He was very conservative, a pleasant man, but I never knew him well. I believe there was talk that he might resign, following the custom that the Republican members of the council had used for a long time, so that they would have plenty of time to appoint someone in his place. However, he served until April 1961, the end of his elected term.

George Pettit had resigned from the council for a sabbatical year of travel in 1958. The majority appointed to replace him with Hurford Stone, who was about to retire as dean of men on the university campus. Then he could run in the next election as an incumbent and that was why there was a two-year term open in 1959 and why five candidates in instead of the usual four.

Morris: That's interesting that Dean Stone was close to retirement at the university when he was appointed.

Mayor Hutchison makes quite a point of the fact that he had been retired for five years from the university before he accepted an invitation to run for mayor, feeling that he didn't want to be that closely identified with the university. Was that a usual feeling?

B. May: Dean Hutchison, who's the last member of the council to be discussed, was a man of great integrity and thoughtfulness. I think this was not a precept that had ever been laid down by anyone but himself. He, I always felt, was an exceedingly good presiding officer, and a very fair one. He in no way exercised any authority as a possible representative of the University of California.

His great contribution to Berkeley, which we'll talk about later, was the concept of regional government and his great effectiveness in working towards the establishment and the shaping of ABAG [Association of Bay Area Government], though it's been reshaped since. It's no longer a center for the exchange of information, but a self-established planning agency. I was fortunate in having the chance to go to many, if not all, of the preliminary ABAG organizing sessions.

I think the only criticism I have of Dean Hutchison as a mayor was the trouble later mayors seem to display also. He felt that the mayor should have some special right to speak for the council.

Morris: Without prior consultation?

B. May: Without prior consultation. That led to some difficulties with those of us who, even though we might know we couldn't vote him down, felt that everything should be issued in the name of the council.

Morris: Do you recall some specific instances where he --

B. May: The one that we had the biggest fight over, which we made him retract, was that he endorsed the Schwartz school of whatever it was. Do you remember when --

Morris: The Christian Anti-Communist Crusade?

B. May: Yes, Fred Schwartz. It must have been after 1961.

Morris: Yes. I would think '62, maybe, because I associate the Schwartz Crusade with about the same time that the John Birch Society was receiving quite a lot of publicity.

B. May: Yes. The mayor endorsed the crusade. It was also decided by the then police chief that his men receive educational credit for the course. The council reversed both actions.

City Staff

Morris: The other major dramatis persona would be John Phillips, the city manager.

B. May: Yes. I thought I would include in the supporting documents the city manager report of the services rendered by the City of Berkeley for 1957-1958, which was the one in circulation for '59. This shows that, under the guidance of a conservative council, the services offered by the City of Berkeley were the classical ones in the textbooks -- law and order, health and safety, streets, cleaning the streets, and so on. There was nothing in the department reports which indicated an awareness of developing social problems and the feeling of many in Berkeley that we should be concerned with racial discrimination, decent housing and fair employment.

The city had and, of course, Mr. Phillips followed it, an item in the charter which said there should be no discrimination in the city's employment, but little was done to push this. The city did have black employees, but there had been no concern to relate the selection process to the needs of the job. I'm not critical of Mr. Phillips. These demands were not made of him and he later adapted to many of them. With the change in concerns of the council, he decided, as a good city manager does, to move on them, too.

Morris: In other words, the city manager's role is to evaluate the council he is working for and --

B. May: He carries out their policies.

Morris: Does he bring things to them that he thinks --

B. May: He is perfectly free to bring recommendations to them. My observation is that city managers tend to be interested in

B. May: expansions of services that mean an expansion of staff, of their administrative responsibility, and so on. For example, almost all city managers are for public ownership of public utilities because it greatly expands their staff, budget, and finances in a way that will build up their prestige, but especially their staff and the size of their budget, whether it's making money or not.

Morris: So, facilities kinds of programs are more their dish of tea than service?

B. May: Yes. Mr. Phillips was also interested, and here I thought very rightly so, in federal money and in urban renewal and wanted action on this in the Telegraph Avenue area. The majority of the council, after the '61 election, was for it. Looking back, we can see that this was a time at which the community was perhaps not fully informed or consulted, not in the way we would do it now. But the main obstacle to the plan really turned out to be, again, those earthquakes.

Morris: This was the plan to make Telegraph Avenue into a mall, to close it to traffic and brick it over?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: And there was an earthquake hazard there?

B. May: Yes. There are so many old buildings in that area, a good many of brick, which would be very expensive to bring up to the revised code, so that the businessmen who had supported renewal changed their minds. There was also a great student opposition to the mall. They said they wanted to keep their convenient automobile transportation. They changed their mind and later wanted a mall. But they were different students.

Morris: Yes. How much of a working relationship did council members have with each other and with the city manager outside of the council meetings once a week?

B. May: Oh, I think John got on well with individual members of the council. Of course, he may have had an easier time with me than with some others because he, too, was a Sam May student. I was careful to observe the etiquette of going through the city manager when I wanted information or to discuss something. But I never found him difficult or "shirty" about that.

Morris: Did you find that you spent much time talking with him or other city employees?

B. May: It depended on the employees. I talked very freely and frequently to Recreation and Parks, Planning, and Social Planning, after it was established; not very frequently to Finance, or Pensions and Annuities.

I would say that within the framework that had been set for him, John was a good city manager. He pointed out to the council again and again the deficiencies it had in the pension funds. He pointed out the deficiencies in maintenance and the lack of space for city employees, all of these things that the city manager should keep before his council.

He frequently recommended changes, such as the hoped-for change in the election of the auditor, which again was clearly within his purview.

Morris: Why was there a change hoped for?

B. May: It makes it difficult not to have an internal audit part of the ongoing business of the Finance Department. You never -- well, "never" is a big word -- but in the history of Berkeley there had never been an adequately trained auditor.

Morris: It's also interesting that the auditor is elected, but the city manager, with whom he'd worked very closely, would be appointed.

B. May: Yes.

Morris: That hoped-for change still has not been accomplished.

B. May: No. And it's an example of the decisions that are made because of staff relationships. It had been thought for many years by the League of Women Voters and others who disapproved of elected administrators behind the city manager that it could be changed at the time of the retirement of the former auditor, who also was not professionally trained. If this were done when he was retiring, then no one would be taken out of a job and it would be easy to retain the assistant auditor in another capacity.

Unfortunately, the auditor suddenly became very ill and died. So, his assistant did not wish the change, with the very good opportunity of running as an incumbent and getting this more profitable job. She has been reelected every time she's run since then. [This incumbent, Myrna Ashley, was defeated in April, 1975, by a 'grassroots' candidate, Florence McDonald. Ed.]

B. May: Many public decisions are made because the citizens are sensitive and do not wish a public employee fired. They say they do, but even in the case of gross misconduct it's hard to fire a public employee and it would have been very hard to fire a conscientious person. As a matter of fact, no one had an authority to fire her.

Morris: That's an interesting comment about the way that staff relationships affect decisions. Do you think this applies also within departments?

B. May: Yes.

Morris: Because someone is a staff department head, their interpretations of an ordinance or the opinion of the council will prevail?

B. May: Oh, I think that when it comes to policy, the council is responsible. But in implementing a measure passed by the action of the council, there is inertia in carrying out the change administratively if it means someone's position is going to be switched or changed or eliminated.

The Multitude of Everyday Decisions

Morris: About how long did it take you before you felt familiar with council procedures and city activities so that you felt you could take some initiative in what was going on?

B. May: [Pauses to think.] That's difficult to estimate. I think I had the feeling, "Ready or not, here I am!"

Morris: Good for you!

B. May: And I'm sure I began voting at once in the light of the best advice I could get. One of the things which was helpful to me was that Art and Jack and I formed the custom of having dinner together before each evening council meeting. We could do this without penalty under the Brown Act because there were not five of us. We usually ate at the Hotel Shattuck.

Morris: Oh, I never thought of that as having a role in the future of Berkeley.

B. May: At that time, it had a role in the city of Berkeley because it was still a commercial hotel and most of the service clubs met there. I must say this was not a gourmet experience, but it

B. May: was convenient.

Art was downtown already. I could leave my car at the city hall. Jack frequently brought his car half way and walked half way. We met and went over the agenda. This gave me discussion, background, and a chance to air my views to helpful critics.

We spent a good deal of time in this period discussing tactics to get started on some of the things we wanted to do. We never went any place where it looked as if we were dodging people, though we sometimes ate at different places.

I had come, you see, with certain campaign commitments. Some of these commitments I changed after I got on the council. For instance, I hadn't really realized how awful the Berkeley Master Plan was.

Morris: Before we get into the Master Plan, did you have some overall, specific goals? What were the tactics that related to them?

B. May: I must say my first goal was to eliminate racial discrimination in Berkeley and to achieve an integrated city. I was reenforced in this goal by the fact that this was also being put forward by the liberal candidates for the board of education.

I would say my second and, I think, related goal was the provision of more open space, parks, planted streets, for the city, not only as a way of lessening environmental pollution, but also as a push against blight in Berkeley, which was beginning to show, in part due to the change of the population in Berkeley and the incoming of many people who were trying to live on very small incomes.

Morris: In other words, there was an actual increase in people of lower incomes at the same time that there was an overall drop in the city's population?

B. May: Yes. We were already beginning to see this during the war. I would have to look at the statistics to know when and how much the shift in population occurred. I think one of the troubles with the Master Plan was that it provided theoretically for a much larger population than it had housing for.

Morris: What kinds of tactics did you discuss over dinner?

B. May: It would depend on the practical issue we were confronting. We usually went over the day's agenda. One of the things I think you and I should look out for in this account is that we perhaps point out now and then lay aside for the next twelve years all of the small, everyday, common sense, non-world-shaking decisions that a local council must make, the multiplicity of appeals, the questions in regard to variances or how you are going to plan business zoning. Are you going to leave it in these long, parallel shopping streets, or are you going to develop concentrated business zones? These you do, in a way, bit by bit.

Morris: And they affect one person's life at a time rather than --

B. May: Often a neighborhood at a time. But it seems to me that if we want to concentrate on what changes, if any, and I think they were great ones, the shift from very conservative and low-tax-concerned people to people who were concerned with the issues I've mentioned and also with the one in which so far we've failed, tax reform, we'd have to do a fancy bit of research work to find a kind of consistency in these individual decisions.

Morris: Yes. Are you saying that a multiplicity of small decisions, say, in the area of requests for variances, can over a period of time become a pattern which does affect the quality of neighborhoods?

B. May: Yes, I think so. But I'm not prepared to discuss that from the background of any solid knowledge because, again, life's too short and I don't have the staff facilities --

Morris: And the detailed data pulled together.

B. May: Right. We provided that for our successors on the council, but not for ourselves. I would like to add that we are not going to analyze the budget year by year.

Morris: Thank you! Are you also saying that these kinds of routine, small details make up a great part of many agendas and that a large part of a councilman's time is involved in the small detail work rather than in the great, sweeping --

B. May: It's always there. I think if we're really going to discuss issues which related to larger changes in our society, we will have to omit a lot of details.

B. May: Going back to your question of what we talked about, the three of us, in these minority dinners, quite often it was whether Joe would get his hamburger stand. I think that it would be more significant to go into some detail on four or five of the large issues which were coming up not only in Berkeley but in older cities generally, though, as one forward-looking member of a later committee said, "You know, the trouble with Berkeley is we're half way through future shock and the rest of the cities haven't started."

Morris: That sounds like that might be the making of a title.

Constituents and Ceremonial Events

Morris: How much interest was there in council meetings and how much personal contact by citizens on various issues?

B. May: I was greatly surprised to find that the budget hearings, except for the Berkeley Taxpayers' Association and the ever-loyal League of Women Voters, drew almost no attendance or comment. Until we began having parades and protest meetings of one kind or another, in the first two years the largest attendance came when a proposal had been made to change a street, a traffic pattern, or to issue a permit for an institution, a church, a playground, or what have you, in a given neighborhood. There often were large attendances in regard to any traffic-increasing change in a neighborhood.

Morris: How about the phone call and the letter and the buttonholing?

B. May: This was not intense during my first term. It built up considerably later and, of course, was very intense during the period of discussion of fair housing and later during violence in the streets and trashing. The harassing or obscene telephone call and the anonymous letter began in 1963 and increased in the late '60s.

[Interruption for visitor.]

Morris: I was asking you how much contact you had with citizens wishing to express themselves in the first couple of years and you said not much.

B. May: Not much individual contact, but lots of ceremonial ones. I was asked to speak to many organizations. Also, in those days, Berkeley had a number of traditional civic affairs which brought you in contact with many citizens. For instance, we had a football festival.

Morris: A university football festival, or Berkeley High?

B. May: Berkeley Golden Bear, which is the university athletes' association. Golden Bear, as I recall it, planned it with the service clubs of Berkeley. This went on during my first term. The festival lasted a whole week, as far as the participants were concerned. A certain number, and I never knew how these were selected, of schools and colleges sent their homecoming or football queen to Berkeley. Among them a queen was chosen for the festival and given not elaborate, but rather pleasant prizes. Of course, she had this fine trip and lots of parties and fun. These included appearances at the service clubs. I was invited to be one of the judges in 1959.

Morris: What fun!

B. May: This took up a lot of time and there was lots of chat about the city at all the various affairs, as well as chat about the festival.

So that the girls would feel perfectly comfortable about posing, the manager of the Claremont Hotel gave a party at his house in Orinda. There was a swimming pool, so that the judges could see the girls in their bathing suits. Many people from Berkeley came and paid for the party, though as a judge and a councilman, I was not asked to pay. That, too, brought lots of new viewpoints, mostly from the businessmen's groups that I didn't know well. I got lots of comment and advice and gave some, of course.

Morris: And how was that received?

B. May: Genially, you know. I hate to record this, but until we began encountering the young, I never heard opposition that was offensive. Sometimes I admit it was hostile because people couldn't control their underlying feelings. There is no more emotional conflict of interest than the conflict of interest of the property owner. He thinks his property rights are in the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, but also that it's God's law that his property should be considered first.

B. May: Then there was a football parade at night. Before the parade, Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Hutchison, who both thought I was crazy in the head but felt that women should stand together, had spoken to me very seriously about what I should wear in the parade. They thought it was absolutely necessary to have a white coat so that people could see you.

Morris: Of course, yes.

B. May: So, I rushed down and bought a white coat and didn't get one heavy enough and just froze!

Morris: I can believe it.

B. May: Right! But the spectators could see me. The council rode in open cars interspersed in the parade between mounted sheriff's posses and riding clubs and so on. The girls were riding also in cars and there were clowns and drill teams and majorettes. But the horses! This was why the children came. There were great, big dray horses and there were wonderful riding horses. There was -- shades of the past! -- an old hook and ladder truck, horse-drawn, not from our department but from another fire department that had it for fun. Do you mean to say your children didn't require you to go to this?

Morris: I remember having one child old enough that I had an excuse to go, yes. I do remember the last of those and thinking it was a great pity that they no longer seemed to be --

B. May: I, too, always thought it was a pity. But this is one of the losses we've suffered because we haven't been decent about other people. This parade was greatly enjoyed by many, not only black but other disadvantaged, children who didn't get around much. Many of them, I'm sure, saw their first horse at this parade.

But this ended in probably '63 or '64, sometime along in there. Golden Bear, of course, had a number of black members who were good athletes. At the game on Saturday the Golden Bears escorted the beauty queen contestants from one side of the field to the other at the half, as part of the halftime ceremonies.

A black athlete, whose name I've now forgotten, undertook this assignment and, unfortunately, through no one's thinking about it, he was assigned not to a girl from a northern college, but to one from the south. She wouldn't go with him. Golden

B. May: Bear said well, okay, if they were going to get into that kind of trouble and their members were going to be embarrassed, that they believed it would be best to stop it.

Morris: To discontinue the whole thing.

B. May: So, they did. But, in many ways, I thought it was too bad because it had gone on for a long time and offered free fun to many.

I enjoyed the girls themselves in '59 and was amused to find that, like the old story about the man who went to the funeral for the ride, that the girls were not tense rivals. The year I was a judge we gave the crown unanimously to a pretty girl from a middlewestern school. She had said in her vitae that she was engaged and would be married when she graduated in another year. She and the man she was to marry had already signed up as missionaries to an African post. I can just imagine the little rhinestone tiara, one of her chief gifts, hanging in the missionaries' hut.

I'm glad I didn't have to do it every year, but since I've never been a beauty judge before or since, I enjoyed it.

Morris: It sounds like a kind of an interesting experience, part of the great American culture.

B. May: Yes. Later I was asked to judge a number of things; once, the dancing at an affair to raise money for the Negro colleges. That was fun too, but very difficult.

Morris: I should think. That would require some knowledge of dancing.

B. May: It was a variety of styles of dancing, let us say.

Morris: Aside from the ceremonial things, how much time did it take you to do the business of the council?

B. May: I very soon began to go to the regional government meetings, which added a full day a month. The council met every week and you certainly had to put in five or six hours preparation on the agenda. Council meetings were long, but not as long as they became later, because Mayor Hutchison was so good at presiding. I would say, in comparison to jobs I've had at the university, it was then about a third-time job.

Morris: That's still quite an investment of time and energy.

Hopes for the Social and Physical Environment of the City

Morris: When we were talking last time, the note I took said that for this first term, fair housing was a primary issue.

B. May: It wasn't really. We made it an issue. It was the integration of the city that was the basic issue, the development of social planning. There was legislation already on the other two great civil rights issues -- accommodations and fair employment and action on desegregation of the schools under Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, twenty years ago now.

Morris: That really is remarkable, isn't it?

B. May: But nothing had been done about fair housing, which seemed to us to be one of the stumbling blocks both in school integration and fair employment. I think the Berkeley experience is significant, despite the fact that it did not accomplish everything we had hoped and is now either forgotten or criticized.

Morris: Fair housing as a means --

B. May: No. I mean the whole effort towards an integrated city. This is the issue: a city in which you can go to school, be served in shops and restaurants and any place you need service, a city in which you can live wherever you want to and wherever you can afford to live.

Morris: Do you feel that that goal is no longer important to the city of Berkeley in its list of priorities?

B. May: Again, that's a complication that we'll get into later. It relates to the tide of rising expectations which always goes faster than efforts towards change can progress. I also think that in our optimism, with black and white working towards an integrated system, we underestimated the inertia of racial discrimination in even a town like Berkeley. I believe the voters had elected people they felt to be progressive and working for needed change, but who wouldn't ask them to change their own habits in their own neighborhood.

Let's go back to a question you asked earlier as to whether I found procedure on the council unfamiliar or difficult. In regard to the council procedure, I think anyone who goes into public life should be familiar with the rules of proper discussion, with the parliamentary procedure, and with the use of the city

B. May: attorney or whatever officer is the parliamentarian.

Freedom of speech is safeguarded by having the conditions of speech the same for everyone. You should stand up for your rights under whatever rules of procedure have been adopted by the body and, if they don't fit, they should be changed by the body.

Morris: That's a nice point in Roberts' Rules of Order that I think people don't realize, that any set of rules can and should be changed to fit the needs of the body.

B. May: Yes. Mental health, I would say, was the first issue on which we were able to work from a minority position.

Morris: And bring that to the point where you had your five votes?

B. May: Yes. And there's a temptation to list a few other things we managed to do as a minority.

Morris: I should say so.

B. May: But, of course, this makes this account all longer and longer, because I want lots of space for improvement of environmental quality, for the attempt to achieve an integrated city, for the efforts towards tax reform, for regional organization, and for the establishment of a consistent capital improvements budget.

All of these we worked on to some extent during the two years we were a minority of three.

Another issue which has always interested me is whether or not city government should be partisan.

Morris: Has that, in a sense, been decided by the fact?

B. May: Yes, our feeling was that the Republicans didn't need party organization because they had the Gazette, which gave them the word and probably entered into the selection of candidates and so on.

Morris: Did the Gazette used to have a larger circulation?

B. May: Oh, much larger.

Morris: A few years ago its circulation was about 16,000 or 17,000, which is, like the Republicans, a minority of the city of Berkeley.*

B. May: There's a theoretical and practical case to be made for partisan government. I think that city government for many years has been partisan in fact, as an adjunct of the Republican party in California. It has been very difficult for others to be elected. You may have noticed, if you read Jack's article when I retired, that he gave me great kudos for joining an effort of the Democratic Caucus to elect me.** But I wouldn't have known how to start out without them.

Morris: Without the support of an ongoing group concerned with --

B. May: Without the knowhow of people who suggested what to do and how to start out about it, but more importantly who supported a program I could work for if elected.

We didn't really get that well reorganized before we had a majority. And when I say gloomy things about the inertia of staff, there were many members of the top personnel of the Berkeley administrative staff who were for changes. Bill Danielson, the personnel director, was one and there were others.

Morris: Did you have a say as the council on who would be appointed to some of the top administrative jobs?

B. May: No. And I don't believe in that. Either you're going to concentrate the administrative power under one man and hold him responsible, or you might just as well not have a city manager.

Morris: Good point. [Thunder clap.] I think maybe I'd better depart before the storm starts. Isn't this a fascinating afternoon?

B. May: Yes. One of the things I love about this house is a rainy day because the rain falls in patterns, which I've never seen before. Sometimes, especially this year, it's been straight down, down, down. But sometimes it blows crosswise.

---

*By 1975, Gazette circulation was reported to be under 10,000. Ed.

**See Mrs. May's papers in The Bancroft Library. Ed.

IX ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE LIBERAL MINORITY: 1959-1961
(Date of Interview: May 20, 1974)

Salary and Recreation Requests

Morris: When we talked last time, we had just started on your years on the council. You said that you'd like to talk a bit about the things that were possible to accomplish in the first two years you were on the council as one of a minority of three councilmen interested in new directions for the city.

Going through the clippings for 1959, I found that there were two things that seemed to have happened right away, as soon as you came on the council. One was a citizens committee report on after-school recreation and one was members of the Municipal Employees' Union appearing and starting what were probably lengthly negotiations on an across-the-board salary increase.

B. May: Yes. To begin with the municipal employees, this was the natural thing for them to do in April or May when the budget was being discussed and when the Personnel Board's recommendations in regard to wage and salary levels were in. The Personnel Board in Berkeley made then and may still make to the council each year reports on the wage level paid for comparable jobs and positions in a selected list of municipalities which have roughly the same area, population, and problems as Berkeley.

This can never be precise because, to take the fire department as an example; Berkeley, as a city of light industry primarily, does not have as many high-risk plants as a city with certain types of heavy manufacturing. When the Colgate-Palmolive plant moved out of Berkeley to get a larger plant area, the fire department was delighted because it was a high-risk industry. We were sorry to lose the taxes, but there was some cheer in the change.

B. May: In addition to the report on compensation for comparable jobs in other jurisdictions, the Personnel Board always added a projection for increases -- we never saw a decrease -- in the cost of living, which they thought should be taken into account with the other factors that the council was considering. Of course, the municipal employees and the various employee organizations -- Police, Fire, and usually the Garbage Department employees came in with their recommendations also. Part of the council deliberation centered on which recommendation we should accept, if any.

This situation now has changed. In my last two years on the council the state legislature enacted a law giving municipal employees the right to organize, or not organize if they voted against it, and set up requirements for cities to meet and confer with the representatives of employees' unions. The City of Berkeley supported this proposal in the legislature because it was obvious that as the numbers of city employees grew, particularly in the larger cities, the situation was one that lent itself to union organization and union negotiation.

It does present major difficulties because a municipal government has to consider the income from taxes that its community can provide. The manufacturer can and does pass on higher wages to the consumer. But this didn't arise until later. As I recall it, 1970 was the first year that we had union negotiations in Berkeley. The formation of the employee unions was preceded by a long series of conferences with the unions who wished to present themselves to employees as an organization and by a long and rather complicated series of elections.

On the whole, I think it's a good thing. I would be happier if there were a definite arrangement in regard to strikes, under which the public service employees would agree to give up the right to strike in return for an equitable arrangement in regard to mediation of wages.

Morris: So that in 1959 was just the annual request for salary increases?

B. May: Yes. It occurred every year as living costs rose. I think you and I should perhaps agree not to include a detailed study of budget-making and the budgets for the period that we are discussing. It seems to me the most interesting characteristic of this period in Berkeley municipal life is the change in services provided by cities to include also the services that relate to the social needs.

B. May: Budgets do not lend themselves to oral history, I think, and we would need stacks of financial records not available to us here. Nevertheless the budget-making procedure is always an interesting one in which there is much discussion and persuasion and, at time, "If you vote for my pet project, I'll vote for yours." I used to be teased a great deal for my advocacy of open-air swimming pools and it was said, "Oh, go tell her you'll vote for a swimming pool if she'll vote for your pet project." I'm not quite sure that's true, but, anyway, I got the swimming pools.

Morris: Good for you!

B. May: Three of them!

Morris: Yes. That was a major breakthrough in Berkeley affairs, wasn't it?

B. May: Yes. Now, what was the other topic you asked me about?

Morris: Recreation.

B. May: Yes. Recreation, of course, came up again every year because Berkeley was then and still is a disadvantaged city when you look at national standards for playgrounds, not open space, but national standards for playgrounds and recreation facilities.

We were not able to do much but talk about this until later on. I feel that Berkeley, particularly in regard to outdoor space for recreation, is still badly served. I have been sorry to see so much money going into buildings for recreation, because I think that Berkeley, like every city, has a great deal of space in school buildings which is not fully used. If we would use some ingenuity in adapting school buildings to adult use, with more informality in seating and larger chairs, so that adults can get into them, greater ease of access, and provision of kitchens to make coffee and other light refreshments -- all of the things that help in a recreation building, I think, could be provided for by joint use of buildings, just as the council on which I served tried to locate city parks next to schools. We located those three swimming pools at three well separated schools so they can be used by school programs yet are accessible to the population of Berkeley as a whole for recreation.

ınd breaking for Willard School swimming pool. December 1963. Left to right: Art Shearer, Larkin, Mayor Wallace Johnson, Roy Nichols, C.H. Wennerberg, Bernice Hubbard May, Gene waechter, John Phillips, Hans Gerson.

Establishing a Mental Health Program

Morris: You mentioned the approval of a local mental health program as being one of the first things you were --

B. May: Yes, this was one of the first things we were able to start on because the Alameda County Mental Health Society had made a good report recommending that Berkeley take advantage of the provisions of the Short-Doyle Act, which provided generous state financing for any county or city health department. The society urged that Berkeley put in all of the services that were called for under a local mental health plan. These were, as I recall it, general education, the provision of training for people working in the field --

Morris: There was also consultation, I believe, to people in related fields.

B. May: Yes. Consultation and help to people, as you say, in related fields, and referral of people to existing sources of treatment. The fifth one and the one that most interested those of us who were concerned about direct services in mental health was a mental health clinic.

In discussing this with members of the society, citizens, and the Health Department, the general recommendation was that Berkeley might well set up a clinic like one that had been operating successfully at Cowell [Hospital] on campus, planned to serve people in crisis. If there had been a family quarrel for example and the husband was busily engaged in beating up his wife and someone called the police, it would be obvious to the policeman that the man or the women, whoever was doing the beating, should be removed from the home while in this fit of rage, which might be a temporary one.

The establishment of the clinic would, and later did, give the opportunity for social workers, or friends of the family, or most frequently the police, to take the person in crisis and distress out of a family situation, down to the clinic, where he might spend perhaps a couple of days, but where he would get a chance to calm down, to talk about his trouble, and be referred either to psychiatric treatment, if he could afford it or if it became available at the county hospital, or to perhaps counseling services, but, in any event, to some solution that he might consider.

B. May: The clinic also, we thought, would be a good solution for people who were in other kinds of emotional problems, but with no one to advise them as to what the next step should be.

With the recommendation of the society and of a good many Berkeleyans and much discussion, we found that we did have consensus that the city apply for Short-Doyle funds for these purposes, all except the clinic. It seemed better to start with the hope of adding a clinic facility later, because the opposition to the clinic was bitter.

Mr. Beckley felt that city health services in general should be those of education, of consulting, and referral, and that the city should not offer in any health field any direct service to patients. We pointed out to him that the Berkeley Health Department did offer preventive services in providing at low fees vaccinations and other shots. But he thought that this was a general preventive service that didn't involve diagnosis or any curative work with patients. So, he would vote for us only for the first four.

Mrs. Thomas was opposed to any and all forms of mental health services, either for the city or for the county. She felt that this was part of what she feared was a widespread communist plan to influence Americans away from their usual forms of government and wouldn't vote for any of it.

As you will recall from our earlier discussion, we took what we could get and established Berkeley's mental health program with only four services in 1959. After we had a liberal majority on the council, we added a clinic to serve those in crisis situations.

Broadening Appointments to Boards and Commissions

Morris: I seem to recall that the council functions with committees. Which committees were you appointed to when you first went on the council?

B. May: The council does have committees with special, rather narrowly defined jobs. When I first went on the council, my main assignment was the appointments committee, which was a committee set up at the request of Mr. Harris and Mr. Kent in order that they

B. May: might have a voice in appointments made by the council to either standing commissions or special citizen committees. Mr. Kent had served on it for two years. Mr. Harris had been proffering lists of names for some nineteen years or so, so they unanimously felt that I should be on the appointments committee.

What the three of us were trying to recommend as a council policy was a bipartisan approach, under which the majority, which was at that time a well united majority of conservatives, should nominate two-thirds of the appointments. Unless we knew something greatly to these people's disadvantage, we should accept the majority judgement. In return for that, we felt that for a third of the appointments they should accept ours.

There was agreement in general to this, though the majority also reserved the right to say why when they thought we were making a poor suggestion. Then, the chairman of the appointments committee reported the recommendations to the council as a whole and it then required five votes to appoint the people recommended. So, it frequently meant that the committee's judgement was overruled because there were only three of us to support with votes our suggestions for appointments.

In spite of the impression that it's easy to get people to serve on boards and commissions, this is not always the case, because people with special skills and capacities frequently can't give the amount of time that's required. So, as well as having to make a recommendation, it was our committee rule that before you recommended anyone, you had to be sure they were willing to serve.

We were able to begin in '59 to recommend black appointees, of whom there were practically none when I was elected. We were able, also because of my volunteer experience and because, with the committee's approval, I usually called the League of Women Voters for recommendations, to suggest more women.

A further recommendation that we were not able to put into effect until after the next election, but which we recommended in the council for size, as it were, was that except under extraordinary circumstances, no one would be asked to serve for more than two terms on a commission. There were very good members of commissions who had just settled down for lifetime service. If you liked it, you stayed on the board or commission. While many of these people were very competent, we felt that there ought to be more coming and going at city hall, but we weren't able to install that as a policy.

Morris: So that one individual could be reappointed indefinitely?

B. May: It would be possible for one individual to be reappointed indefinitely. As a matter of fact, many very good people were appointed over and over again. I think Mrs. [Ruth] Scheer, for example, served from the early '50s to probably about '63 before she was replaced. My husband served about the same time period.

Morris: On which committee was this?

B. May: On the Personnel Board. And I could name others. If you didn't say you didn't want to be reappointed, you normally remained on the board as long as you attended.

The other real achievement, we felt, in these two years came out of the concern of Harris, Kent, and May to begin to do something more than appointments for the disadvantaged minorities in Berkeley, which at that time were largely black. The black population of Berkeley had increased sharply during and after World War II. Berkeley had become a city divided into a black community on the flats near the Bay, and a white community, going from the flats to the eastern hills.

This resulted from the attitudes of homeowners, apartment house owners, and perhaps to a lesser degree, real estate dealers. We were frequently told by real estate salesmen that they didn't care as long as they got the price and their commission to whom they sold a piece of property, but that they avoided the reputation of being dealers who sold to black clients to break into new areas.

Some blacks already lived in the hills. These almost without exception had some white friend buy the house and resell it to them, or they had to find an occasional believer in integration who was willing to sell directly. I think many of us, including myself, did not realize the difficulties as we started on housing, which seemed to us to be a major obstacle in the integration of both the schools and the community as a whole -- we were, of course, encouraged by the operation at this time and its very good report later of a committee which had been formed by the school board at the urging of the NAACP, then under the presidency of Roy Nichols. This committee, chaired by Judge Redmond Staats, urged that steps be taken at once toward the integration of the schools.

B. May: This led to the Berkeley Plan, which came along later in the later '60s, and to the plan for busing, which I think has worked well in Berkeley. We must keep in mind Berkeley's geographical situation, in which we do not have long bus rides and also that busing has been backed up by careful planning, perhaps not yet entirely successful, but at least shows concern for smaller classes, better trained teachers, and recognition of special problems among children who come from disadvantaged homes.

Morris: Did you stay in touch with Roy Nichols after you campaigned together in '59, so that you knew he was going to work with the NAACP for action on this committee's report?

B. May: Yes. These were our views. I was a member and usually, when I could, attended NAACP meetings.

Morris: Were those meetings well integrated?

B. May: At that time, NAACP was well integrated. I sometimes thought that there was a larger white than black attendance. Whites seemed to have a greater tolerance for a greater training in long, long sitting at meetings. One expected to see one's black friends come in late and ask, "Well, what have you done so far?"

New Scope for the Welfare Commission

B. May: The three of us, without a majority vote, nevertheless had a good starting point. The city Welfare Commission was having its fiftieth anniversary and also its director was about to retire. The Welfare Commission had been established before the federal and state assumption of major welfare activities in the 1930s.

So, its responsibility for direct family or personal relief was over. Toward the end of the commission's history, it had been devoting its attention largely to an expert referral service, sending inquirers to where they could get financial or other relief, and to the review of organizations wishing to make direct money collections in Berkeley --

Morris: Like the March of Dimes?

B. May: Yes. And many, many others because many organizations wished to go door to door. More did that in the early '60s than today

B. May: because people don't stay home now as much as they did. This was an important function which the director, with the commission's approval, carried out.

Then they carried on some community projects, helping with camperships, as I recall it, and a drive each Christmas for gifts for families who are nominated by welfare workers or public health nurses and also by agencies, such as Family Service, which gave counselling and other services, but no longer supplied any form of cash or kind relief. Gifts were also asked from school children -- canned goods, toys, and other appropriate things.

Morris: Socks, too.

B. May: Socks also? Good!

I remember later being a little upset to receive from one of the taxicab companies a large Christmas box of canned tuna. So, I took it down and gave it to the Christmas project, only to discover later that everybody else on the council had eaten their tuna.

Morris: That's marvelous. What kind of a person was Margery Carpenter?

B. May: A well-trained social worker and a good statistician. She was particularly interested in the problems of aging and, as I recall it, had organized some projects. I think I served before I was a councilman on two city committees in regard to problems of the aging. But we didn't really get very far. Again, money, money, money!

I was interested in one man who served on a committee on aging with me and who became a good friend. Well into his seventies, he was taking art courses at McKinley Continuation School. He frequently and passionately advised us to let older people alone, but to make available to everybody classes that would be suitable for seniors from the point of view of time and of getting up and down the steps; it was an early advocacy of ramps which I've never forgotten.

He kept saying, "You just assume that old people want do do fingerpainting. That's not so. I want to be working with young artists. My wife doesn't wish to paint at all and I respect her choice. I much prefer to go to a general class."

B. May: We didn't violate his views because our recommendations were never carried out. But it's interesting to me, when, at the moment, I can't go up and down steps myself, to grasp how long it took us to realize the need for access to every public building, for the temporarily or permanently handicapped. And with skiing, we'll always have people on crutches!

The fiftieth anniversary was approaching, so the council was willing to form a committee to work with Margery Carpenter and members of the welfare commission on a review of the commission's assignment and a look at what it might be doing in the future. It's hard to vote against a study. We were able to put into the charge to the committee that they consider the changed social needs of the people of Berkeley, including a study of racial discrimination.

This committee worked for some time and later brought in, among other recommendations, the suggestion that the commission be concerned more directly and year round with the problems of youth. From this later came the Berkeley Youth Council, which has had its ups and downs, and all the better, but has survived. It also paved the way for a later committee that was to investigate racial discrimination in Berkeley and from which the beginning of the recommendation for the fair housing ordinance, which was passed, late in '62, came. To emphasize that change was anticipated, we re-titled the commission "Human Relations and Welfare."

I would say mental health, the start towards a revision of the assignment of the Welfare Commission, which ended up by Berkeley's having the first city Department of Social Planning in the state and, as far as I know, one of the first nationally --

Morris: It's interesting looking in the other way too, that Berkeley had a staff person responsible for welfare needs so far back.

B. May: For fifty years. But, as was natural, the definition of welfare had narrowed and needed re-thinking.

Civic Art Commission

Morris: The other area that we mentioned was the physical environment of the city. Did you make any headway on that?

B. May: I would say that we made no notable headway in regard to that. Something that we did do, quite early, was the establishment of an art commission. In one of his early campaign statements when he was running for re-election in '61, Jack Kent took credit for it -- though how he could when we only had three votes, I don't know. We certainly supported it and probably suggested it. This was another way to make Berkeley a modern city.

You may not think that this has anything to do with an integrated city --

Morris: Part of its purpose was to encourage black artists?

B. May: Yes. One of the early efforts to expand the interests of Berkeley as a whole was the establishment of an art commission, which we felt could offer a local outlet for the strong interests of black men and women in the arts and an inexpensive place to exhibit their works.

Morris: In other words, one of the first goals of the Art Commission was to establish local exhibit facilities?

B. May: Yes. The Rotary Club gave an exhibit building and was a little astounded because the first director --

Morris: Yes. Carl Worth.

B. May: The first director was especially chosen by the recreation director and the city manager because of his experience in modern art and current exhibits.

Morris: It was also the Rotary Club's fiftieth anniversary. Were they looking for ideas on what to do for the city for its fiftieth anniversary?

B. May: No. The Rotary Club were self-starters. I think it was Gene Saalwachter who sold them the idea, as a Rotary Club member.

Morris: I see. How did the council react to the proposal that they establish an art commission?

B. May: Oh, you know, it sounded fine. No suspicions. We got that over early. Johnny didn't like it.

Morris: John DeBonis. Why not?

B. May: Oh, he thought it was nonsense.

Morris: That the city government shouldn't be interested in frills like art?

B. May: Yes. And, of course, it cost the city some money and a hunk out of Live Oak. There was some protest, but not much.

Morris: Yes, I think it has actually enhanced that section of Live Oak Park, which was separated by Walnut Street from the major part.

B. May: Yes. And I think it's a charming building, but it hasn't, to be honest about it, been used just as the Rotary envisioned it. They thought of it as being a place for the Garden Club and I could wish that the director would do some things like the Garden Club because there are all kinds of people who are interested in the Garden Clubs or in garden displays. It would be a fine place to display bonsai, in which there's a great deal of interest. I'm not sure it's secure enough for exhibit nowadays.

Morris: Art would have been a whole new commission for appoint people. Were people more willing to serve on this that you recall?

B. May: No, I don't think so, neither more nor less. Of course, what we tried to do and hopefully succeeded in doing was to find people who were either practicing artists or longtime patrons of a given art. There I'm thinking of one of the people first appointed on the commission, Mrs. William DeLoss Love, who was a good amateur musician, but had long interested herself in promoting concert series in Berkeley and Oakland as well.

Interestingly enough, at that time I remember speaking to one of the downtown merchants about a committee for which we wanted to nominate him, as one who would be interested in the problem of planning to revitalize Berkeley's Shattuck Avenue.

He said no, he wouldn't be interested in serving on that because he expected to be going to Chamber of Commerce meetings and so on if we entered that field, but that he would like to serve on the art commission. I remember his saying, "I would very much like to see Berkeley buy a piece of sculpture by Henry

B. May: Moore and put it on Shattuck Avenue. If that's the kind of thing the art commission will get around to -- "

Well, I couldn't promise him that they would ever have the money to buy a Henry Moore, but it was good to know of his interest.

Morris: Was he appointed?

B. May: He was appointed and accepted.

Morris: He didn't accept the responsibility for raising the money to buy a Henry Moore sculpture?

B. May: No, he didn't.

Morris: Was Hans Ostwald one of the first appointees?

B. May: No. He served later on the art commission, at the time of the street sign fight, in which he was interested.

The Case of the Pilfered Bonsai

B. May: Speaking of security at the art center reminds me of the time my bonsai was stolen.

Morris: From your home?

B. May: The one right outside the door, that big red maple. Bonsai goes through fashions like everything else, and ours is from a period of large specimens. My husband and I bought it for a garden we had on Vine Street to replace a blue ceramic Kwan Yin by a pond which in some way or another was broken. We were desolate. We couldn't find another Kwan Yin that suited us at a price we could afford to pay. So we surveyed Berkeley nurseries and bought this maple. My husband had among the things from his parents' home a large bronze jardinière and we had holes bored in it and the maple tree planted. We bought it in 1942 or '43 and it's grown and flourished ever since.

When I was on the council, I came home one night too tired to look around. But the next morning, there was no bonsai. So, I called the police, and a patrolman came. Fortunately, in response to his first question, I produced a good photograph

B. May: of the tree and the jardinière which had been taken by a professional photographer for a magazine. Well, a glossy print -- that was fine.

Then he said, "How much is it worth?" And I said, "I would think at least $100 or $150." He said, "Well, how much is that pot worth?" "Oh," I said, "It's so old. I don't know, but I wouldn't sell it for less -- ." He said, "Just a minute. Let me evaluate it. If we make it over $100, that's grand theft. Just let me try this." So, he went down to the Gazette and they ran just the picture with a caption saying that this tree had been stolen from my garden and that it was worth $250, which made the offense grand theft, subject to -- and then they listed the penalty for grand theft, and that the police would be very glad to have information as to the bonsai's whereabouts.

The Gazette had hardly been out an hour, the police said, when they got a telephone call saying, "If you want to pick up that tree in a bronze pot, it's in the parking lot of such-and-such a medical-dental building on Telegraph Avenue."

Morris: Good heavens!

B. May: The police didn't telephone me. They came in the patrol car, bearing the little tree. I was delighted. It was in the spring, we were doing budget, and there was a meeting with the Personnel Board that night. So, I came in absolutely all smiles and reported as the board and council were assembling what a fine police force we had and talk about quick action! Art Harris looked up and said, "They'll do anything to get their salaries raised!"

117399

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C088175184